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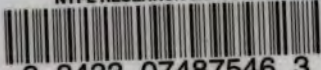
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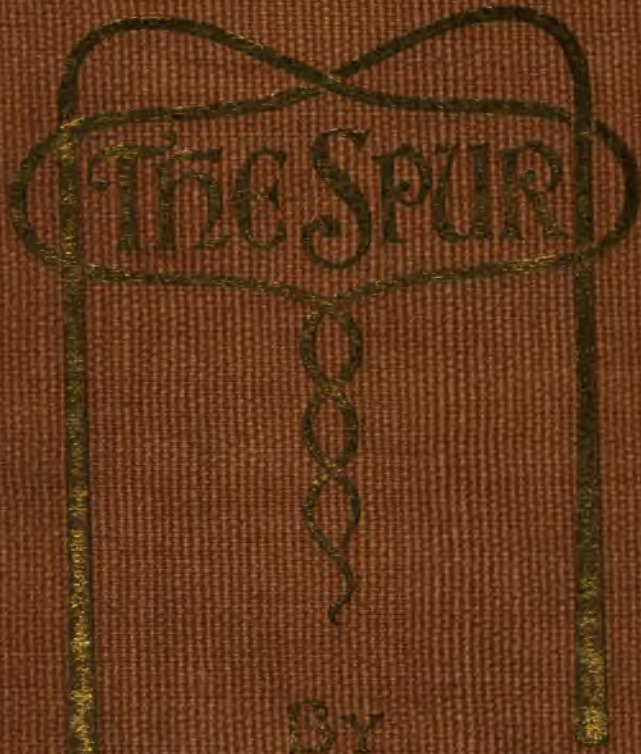
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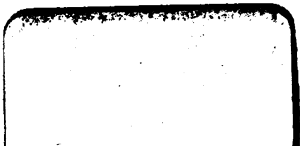


THE SPUR

By
G. B. LANCASTER

The title 'THE SPUR' is embossed in a decorative, Art Nouveau-style frame. The frame consists of two vertical lines that curve at the top to form a wide, rounded arch. A central vertical line descends from the center of the arch, ending in a decorative, wavy tail. The author's name 'G. B. LANCASTER' is embossed below the title, with 'By' centered above it.

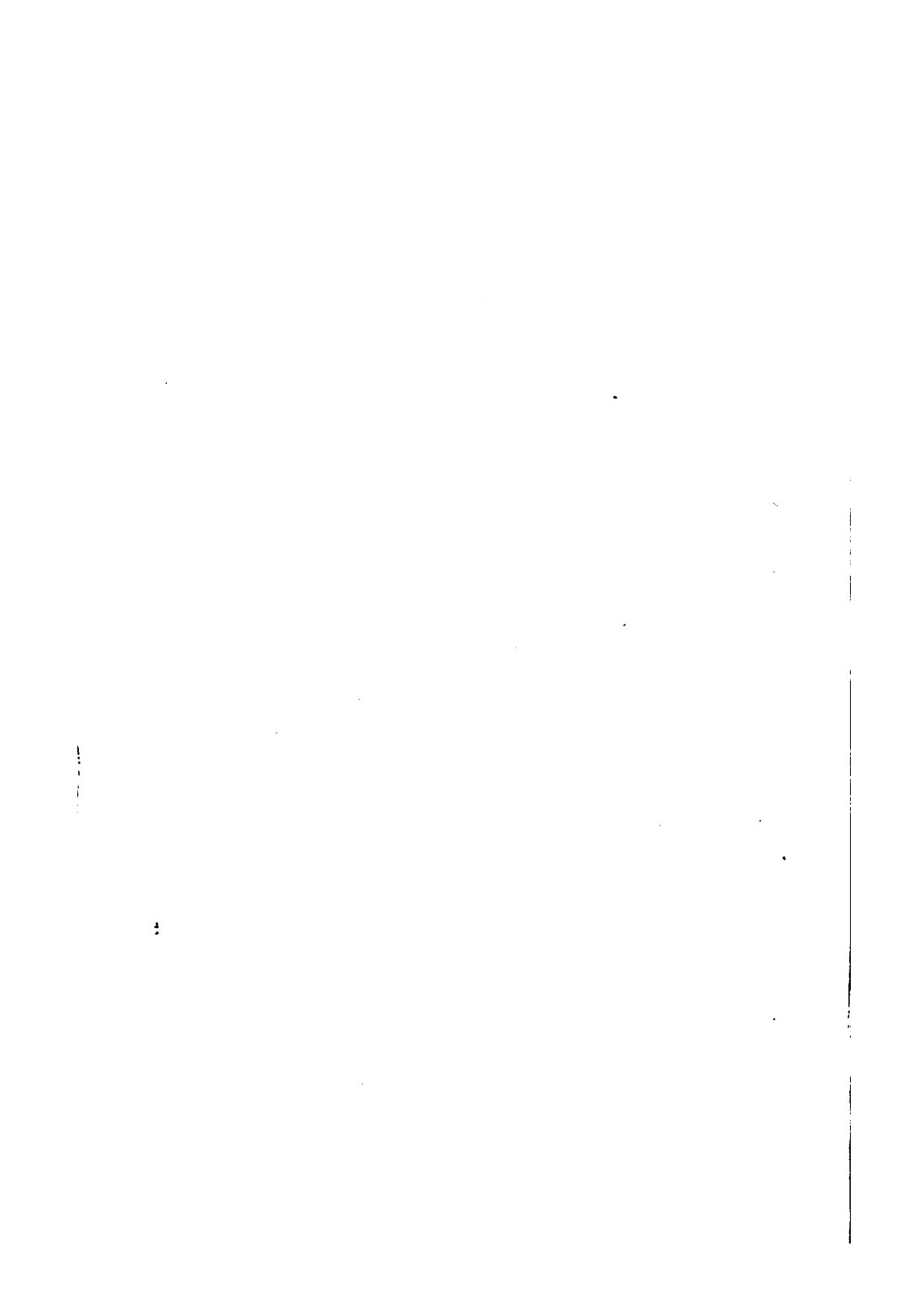
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THE SPUR



The Spur

OR

The Bondage of Kin Severne

BY

G. B. LANCASTER

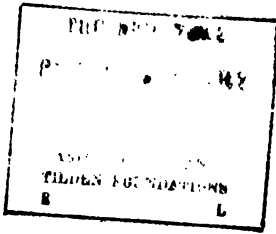
Author of "Sons o' Men"



New York
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1906

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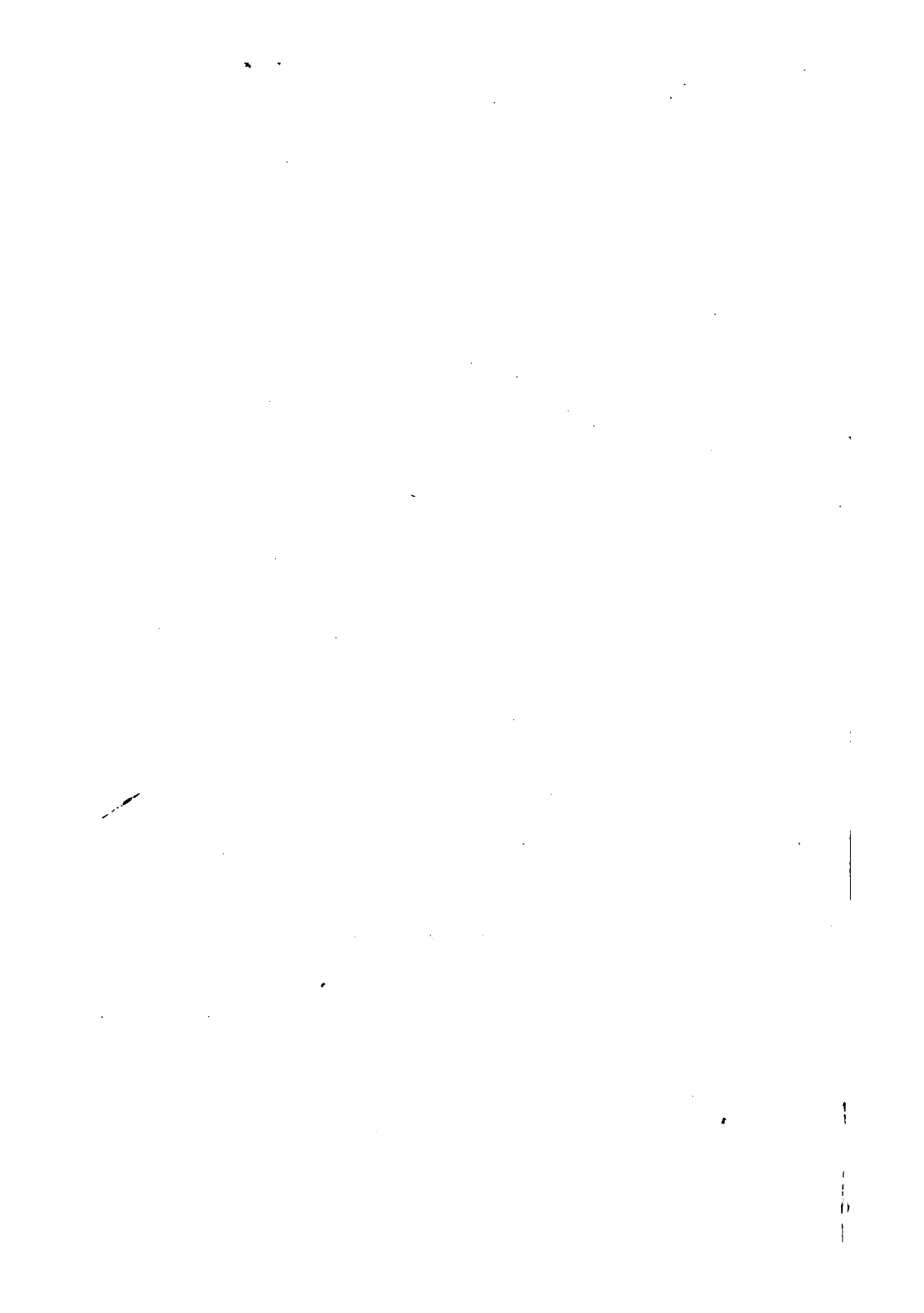
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"I am just a whip, and a spur to smite
To fierce endeavor:
Through the longest day and the darkest night
I urge thee ever."

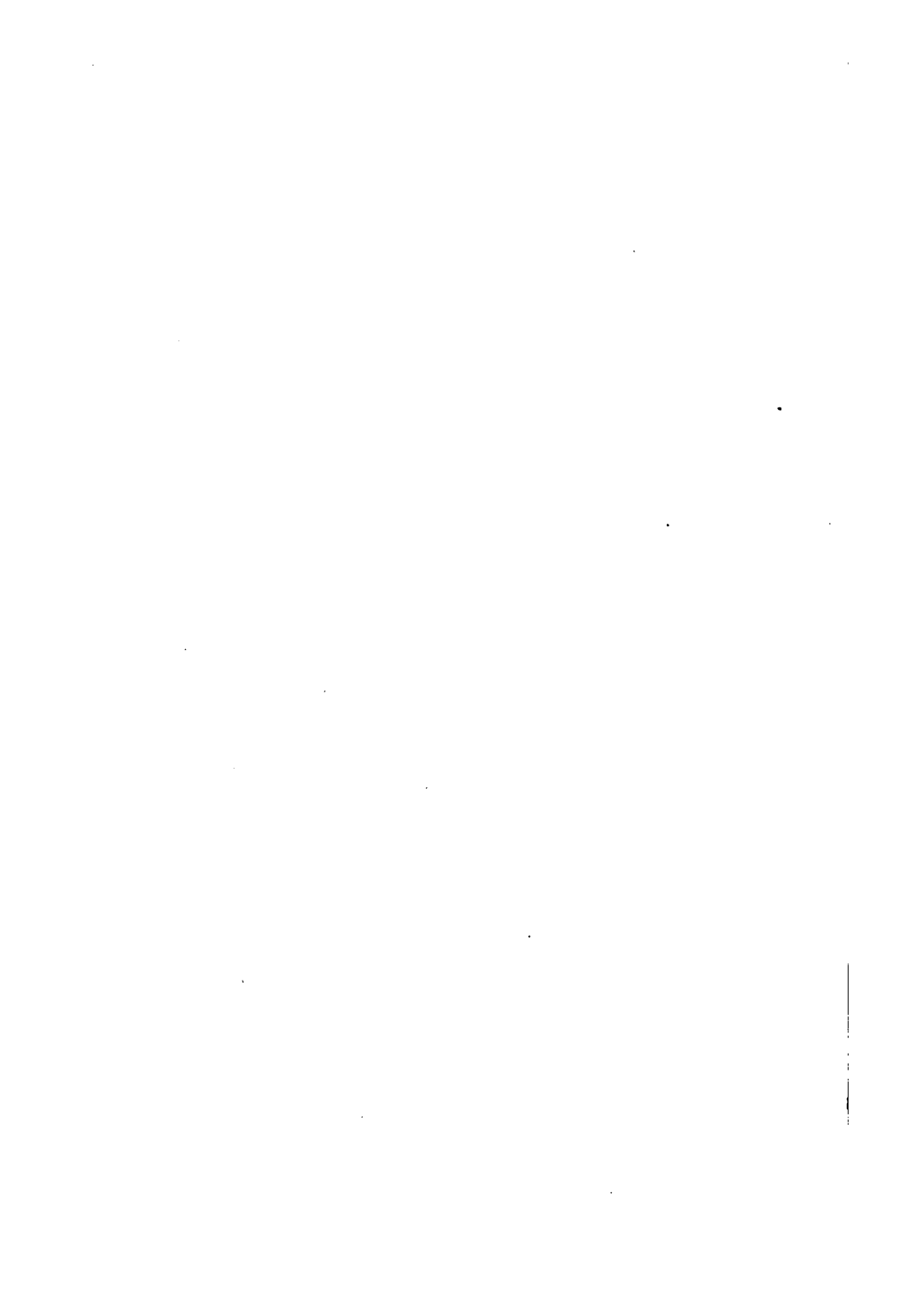
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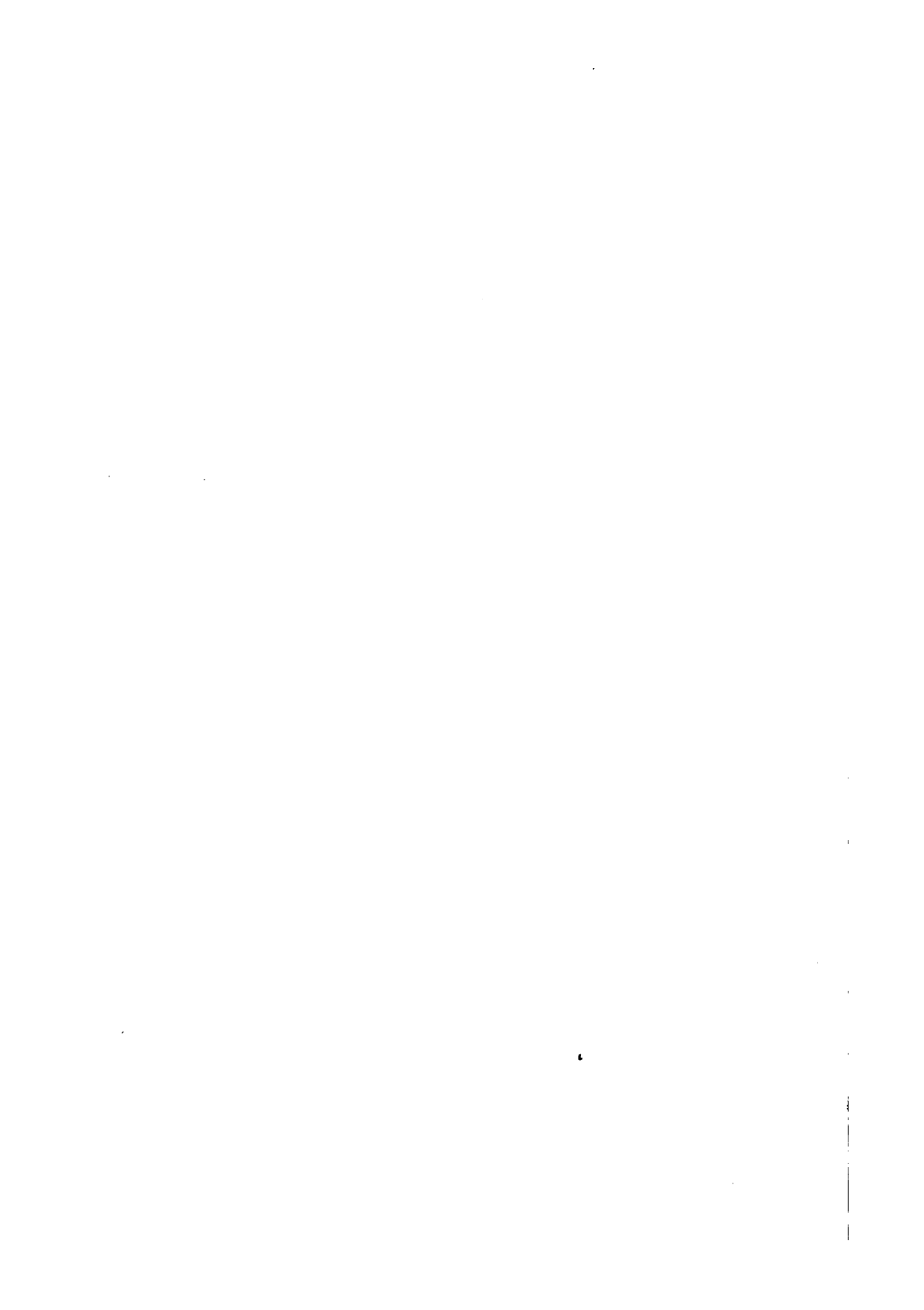


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THE SPUR



THE BONDAGE OF KIN SEVERNE

CHAPTER I

HOW THE SPUR WAS SET

THE sky was brass, and the earth was tow colour, with a livid heat reeling giddily between. The dead air, thickened and greyed by a long day's dust, vibrated and grew sullenly still again as little spume devils of sudden blasting wind flickled through it, and were gone.

Haddington, on the half-unloaded bales of a broken-down wool waggon, endured with many groans, and did not sufficiently thank heaven for the uncertain shade cast by a full-bloomed wattle tree.

Haddington was of no particular origin, so far as anyone knew—or cared. He had the Yankee cunning, and the French suavity, and the Dutch dislike of open hostility. For the rest, he was simply Haddington perspiring on a wood bale, and re-making his beliefs on the understanding that this place was very evil, and desperately offensive to all the senses.

He had come up-country to see the Australian world as interpreted by the flesh and the devil; and he found it very unshaven and unashamed when seen from the inside, and more strident in its young strength than agreed with him.

This was to Frazier's interest originally; for Frazier of Coolibah was a smart man, and Haddington habitually nourished acquaintanceship with smart men. It is only the fool who chooses fools to work for him.

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But in Frazier's shearing shed Haddington had found one by whom Frazier was as a suckled babe, and this was why Haddington chewed the cud of purpose and waited in the heat for the shed to come out.

There was life in the raw below and beyond the wool bales. And there was noise, for the sound scaled from the tight-strung "ping" of a mosquito army smelling out fresh human blood to the full-octaved heavy tonguing of forty thousand sheep—with forty thousand more added.

The sheep were thick in the mulga scrub, rimming the empty stone-bottomed creek where drovers beat and bellowed, and dogs ran in to mouth the stragglers with persuasive silent snaps. They were thick in new and startling whiteness under the line of scraggy gums that stretched into the haze of a barren and a limitless land. And up from the East—into the eye of the sun—drifted a rolling smother of yellow dust in the wake of regiment on regiment of sheep for the shears.

Haddington turned on the spring of the bale and looked to the drafting yards. And he saw that they were murmuring seas of grey wool where black rocks shouted hoarsely, and worked many little gates with ordered confusion.

But the bare white bodies signed by the red cross of Coolibah made foam that lapped through the gum-pole yards and the pens and more pens to the very lip of the straddling iron-roofed shearing shed.

The shed was hideous as original sin, and much more unbearable. Haddington had borne three minutes of its sun-dried airlessness that reeked with the taint of sheep and the tar pot. Then Frazier took him out and gave him a cocktail.

"It's not a place for a man of sensibilities," said Frazier, and laughed. But the man who was cleverer than Frazier handled the shears yet as he had done

through all the days of the Coolibah shearing, and Mur-runowna before that.

"Runnin' for ringer's place, are you, Kin?" said the one who shore next him, and kicked his sheep out through the trap door. "With the heat enough to curl the roof off the shed too! But there's hotter blood in you than the sun breeds, I reckon. We can't stan' up to it like what you can."

Kin raised his head, and a wrinkle came over the strong nose where age had set no lines as yet.

"What kind o' heat curled your roof off?" he demanded; for a youngster does not like insinuations in face of men who can shear their three hundred a day. And to meet the wrath that followed he brought brilliant little thumb-nail sketches of ill deeds done by the bald-headed one Out Back.

All the shed feared Kin's tongue and rejoiced at it, and a Maori from over the water bellowed a snatch of song in the vernacular as approval. Kin had picked up a smattering of Maori among other things, and he unabashedly proceeded to turn the thing into flagrant and totally incorrect English. Then a classer came to the head of the board to speak heatedly and for the space of two minutes. Kin chuckled, glancing along the line with quick black eyes. Clarke's officialism was over-nuew on him, and there were times when he outran his tether. But the cruel heat had drained pugnacity out of the men, and silently they dropped to their work again.

One and all they were half stripped, and bowed in the back with that loin stoop that makes a shearer old before his time; and their deep whistling breaths of exhaustion mixed with the other sounds that go to make Inferno of a big shed in the hot weather.

These sounds were part of Kin's life, and marched to a tune of his own as the greasy swishing click of

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shears opening upon a heavy fleece was broken and strung together endlessly by the clatter of turning hoofs on the board, the growling of the classer at the table, and the flap-flap of the fleecies' sacking shoes.

"And we learn that all men are equal in the sight of God," said Haddington, phrase jobber and dabbler in literature. "Good Faith! What fools we are in our youth."

For he knew that men in the sight of man take degrees and planes innumerable. And the bulk of us set up Man as our God.

He stared into the darkened jaws of the shed, and the grunt and squeal of the wool press came out to give him the key to a shearer's life.

"He can't get above the brutality of it. Can't possibly. Every line of his writing smells of it. But it's good writing. Better than good, I fancy, when he comes to his own. I rather think——" and then the shed came out.

Haddington watched the crowd that lay about with slacked limbs, smoking the fierce black tobacco that puts new heart into a man, drinking the strong black tea from great shining pannikins, and yarning in the casual speech that is neither unadulterated nor undefiled.

A bell rang somewhere, and Haddington leaned over the bale.

"Kin," he called.

Kin was sparring idly with a hairy overlander from the North, but he came across to the waggon on the instant. It is possible that he had been listening for that word.

"Well?" he said, and his keen young face hardened under the tension that held him.

Haddington spoke, and his words remained forgotten. For they were the beginning of a new dispensation.

"You can—ah—spare me a few minutes when you leave off work? I think you may find that it will—ah—possibly be to your advantage."

Kin had seen the roll of soiled paper at Haddington's elbow, and he knew it as a ewe knows her lamb in a flock of a thousand head. He hesitated, desirous to shake more finality from the lazy, drawling mouth above. But the clamour of the bell shut to a silence that called relentlessly.

"Right," he said, and sprang over the shed sill into the rank noise and dirt of it all.

A sudden surging hope unsteadied him as he got his shears from the sharpener, drew out a sheep and settled into line, one dogged clock-work figure among many.

"He talks like an ad. column and he looks like a blessed tailor's dummy. But he has got the cash and—the brains, too, I think. Now, what's to pay over it all in the end, eh?"

Outside, Haddington flicked his cigarette-ash away with a delicate ringed finger.

"And the question is," he said, "will it be worth it? For it will take time—and tact."

Haddington had got himself a name as a writer of clever balderdash, and a certain ability to distinguish between the stone that glows under the lathe and emery and the stone that will crumble and dull. The other things—the things that governed his life—he nursed in silence. But as all parts of his mind led to the temple of his own conceit, Kin would of necessity serve these other things if Haddington made him, as he had intent to do.

Therefore, it was a grave matter to undertake the destiny of the Australian-born, and only the gods or Haddington would have dared it.

The burden of the day roared on to its breathless

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close. And all the while the Warrego River babbled incessantly past the great wattle-trees, telling of that which would have opened Haddington's understanding to the lives of some men, and of Kin in chief, if it had not been just ripple of water to him.

It talked of the shrivelled plains over the Queensland border, and of black fellows camped in the gidya scrub beyond Clay Pan Hollow.

"There is a white man's gin hiding in the banks where they shelve behind the humpy," it said; "and she is afraid to come out because her tribe will kill her. And she is afraid to stay there because she will starve. For the white man has gone—tired of her and gone. He always does. I know. It will mean bones in any case," gurgled the Warrego; "bones, and dingos, and——" the mutter went on round the flank of the concrete dipping yards, and Haddington yawned, and fell gently asleep to the unheard tragedy of it.

Later, shadows drove across the aching land in long tense blades of quivering black. The red sunball dropped suddenly behind the rim of the great greying plain; and through the tramp and coarse talk of men going heavily across to the huts, Kin came up to the waggon top.

"Thermometer 112 on the board to-day," he remarked, slapping the pockets of his tattered tweed coat one after the other, and bringing out the fag-end of a plug, and a briar that was an offence in Haddington's nostrils.

"Really? And—ah—who made top score?"

This is the only possible and polite question to ask a shearer at the tail of the day's work, but he does not like it served up as if he was part of a cricket team. In his disgust Kin meditated "pulling the beggar's leg." But, for the sake of the roll of paper turning dingier in the dusk, he descended to flat truth.

"Jackson — from Macquarie. Only 189. Those

wethers are—the very dickens to handle! all grit and thistles and pigheadedness. Hard in the yolk too.” Then he laughed, and stretched limbs of that leanness which means strength in the Australian breed.

“Strike me lucky if the Boss ain’t wild to-night! The Corrabinda chap—he took Reilly’s place, number five on the left—just tommyhawked his sixty into patchwork. Grafted hard enough over it too. Grunt for grunt with the blanky old press. Eh? Oh yes; Frazier saw ’em in the pen. We’ll be shearin’ one short to-morrow.”

He smoked in long quick breaths, glancing down keenly on the dregs of a tired day’s froth and labour; secure in the knowledge that neither king nor principality nor super dare bear rule over him till the morrow, and nervous exceedingly with longing to hear Haddington’s words.

Haddington watched the boy under dropped lids. He guessed—lop-sidedly, and just a little—at the spirit that was to be broken or to come to great fruit in this youthful son of a youthful country, and he felt a growing resolve to have the handling of it. Also, he marvelled.

“What are you doing among this—this scum?” he asked, with a comprehensive wave of white fingers. “You are not one of them, you know.”

Kin snuffed the acrid smoke of gum-leaves from the hut fires, and his eyes contracted. For, according to his religion, it is not nice to call the people of another country by rude names.

“D’you know any more about these fellows than you do about me?” he demanded.

“No,” admitted Haddington.

“An’ you know nothing about me,” suggested Kin suavely. Then he relented. “True enough, you’ll find scum everywhere—where there’s somethin’ better underneath. We’ve got the nephew of a Duke here

now, an' he's scum o' greasy dishwater if ever I saw it. A Spanish Duke, I think," with a sidelong glance at Haddington's colouring. "What way do you define scum?"

"You seem to—ah—know some strange men," remarked Haddington vaguely. This boy was pushing him on to that stratum of life which polite society teaches her children to avoid, and he was not ready for it.

Kin cast down his idle scorn, and spoke from the bitter young heart of him.

"Know! I think I do know! From the soul of me! So'd you know if you'd a'been a poor little beggar of a fleecy wi' the skin burst, an' throbbin' on your feet from the shed work. So'd you know if you'd had the shearer's yarns an' oaths slick an' ready on your tongue ever since you were a kid. An' if you'd fooled round at wayside pubs on a spree-night, or humped your swag across the Paroo, an' all up the Queensland border in a hard year, and begged like a dog for work—an' not got it—you'd know—yes; you'd know somethin' o' men then."

Haddington hid his disgust skilfully. The raw material is always rough to handle; but it is well to remember that most things are raw in the beginning. Except oysters, and they are never anything else. He touched the bundle of worn manuscript that lay on the bale.

"How long did it take you to write this stuff?"

"'Bout two years. I did it mostly on the track." Kin's mouth hardened to think of all he had put into that bundle through those years. Things that Haddington and such as he could never understand; that the waiting kingdom of Australia keeps for the sons she has born and bred; that are the heritage of her sons to be.

And the knowledge of many of these things is not at

all desired by the alien, nor by anyone else. But that is a detail. Kin and the Warrego knew that they were worth the knowing. The Warrego was talking to him now of the wide bleached plains he had tramped last year, of the dumb, sick hopelessness that dogs a man on the track when nights are black and the rain has a bite in it, of the lazy afternoons under the mimosa-bushes, with a good station two miles away, and a golden-warm sunlight waking the crickets in the grass, of the realisation that a man's life or death is in his own hand.

"Kin," said Haddington slowly, and the Warrego dropped to meaningless babble again: "Kin, it's in you to do good work. Bea-rock good work. Did you know it?"

The boy sat still, and his eyes were hidden by his slouch hat. In a big blue-gum a magpie was rejoicing because the day's heat had killed the sun, and the scarlet on the western lip of earth palpitated and faded before Kin spoke.

"Yes; I know. But what o' that? It can't be more than an incident. I haven't got the time. I never will have."

"The epicure is the only man who does not know that everything is an incident—and soon forgotten. What would you do if you—ah—had the time?"

"Graft," said Kin simply. Then he laughed, and lay over on the bale. "You know well enough that I could make folks listen if I had the show. If I could get a bit more learnin'—you know I could write stuff that would live if I could handle grammar like I can handle shears: an' if it didn't take me all of my time to live myself."

"Modesty was ever a failing of the young," remarked Haddington softly. "And if you got your public to listen to you—mind you, it has other things to think of

occasionally—do you know what you would do? You—ah—would find that there is no god but the Money-God. You would learn that the world can be measured by the standard of its coinage, and you would pay all your illusions into the bank with your first cheque and go on a hard-cash foundation through—ah—all your life.”

Haddington was a windy man in his speech, and he did not talk the truth of the Warrego. Kin knocked out his pipe contemptuously,

“I wouldn’t,” he said.

Haddington looked at the strong irregular face that was blue and unshaven about the cheeks and lips, and almost he believed. And it came to him that this unlicked cub would be worth the training.

“There are some—ah—philanthropists, Kin, who take pleasure in discovering an embryo poet, or musician, or—ah—jockey, and—ah—in presenting him to the world. In short—”

“Runnin’ him for all he’s worth. I know. There are some—ah—philanthropists make a corner in anythin’—man, or mineral, or medicine. It’s a paying game—for the philanthropist. Well?”

“Well?” returned Haddington quietly. His challenging eyes met Kin’s, and all the craft in the two men awoke at the meeting.

Haddington loathed nothing so much as direct speech. Kin guessed, and forced it.

“Well, *what?* Give us it straight.”

“If I were a philanthropist and you an embryo, would it interest you if I—ah—offered to put you in the way of realising your desire?”

Kin’s blood was pumping through his body until it shook. He grinned blandly, keeping hold on himself.

“What’d you give me: eh?”

"What would you offer in exchange?" demanded Haddington, surprised into showing his business instincts.

Kin turned out his pockets, collecting heels of tobacco sticks, dirty bits of scribbled paper, and other like valuables.

"Every blessed thing I got," he explained gravely: "'cept my bluey in the hut, and a forty-pound cheque when we cut out. But I owe most o' that. I've nothin' else marketable. But I'd give my chance o' eternal life for my chance here—now."

Thus Kin spoiled the game at the beginning. Haddington hid a smile; for he understood that this man was yet a savage, to whom cunningly displayed pinchbeck would hold the worth of gold.

"My dear fellow, your chance of eternal life would be of absolutely no assistance to me; quite the reverse, probably. But I fancy that you can give me something more—ah—valuable, according to this world's lights. And those are the lights for which we pour out our incense and—ah—our sulphur and petroleum. Well"—Haddington stood up, a well-preserved, tailor-made figure against the primrose west—"if you care to come up to the house, say half an hour after dinner, it is possible that we may arrive at some understanding. If I engage to help you, I should naturally expect—ah—my price—"

Kin's bullet head reared beside him, black and uncompromising.

"When you're asked to give somethin' for nothin'," he said curtly, "it'll be time enough to talk. You'll get your money's worth out o' me—if we put up a deal."

He dropped down the bales and tramped quickly across to the raw scarlets and pearl greys of the hut lights. And the old shadow of work and weariness met him under the dripping wattlebloom.

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Haddington caressed his moustache with slow fingers.

"And if we do make a deal," he said softly, "by——, but I will work my corner for all it is worth! He is all man, and rather more than a little devil, I fancy—and it is not politic to leave too much to the drift of things."

After dinner that night he had occasion to ask Frazier a question. Frazier of Coolibah was a man of wisdom. He knew to a head what sheep per acre all the big Yanda stations could carry in a good season. Also, how many months he could give others with a river frontage when the droughts came. And what time there was a slump in the Home market, and Continental buyers dallied rapidly and sinfully, and cockatoos rushed the monthly sales—Frazier knew just exactly what to do, and therefore accumulated money before his hair was grey. Consequently he was quite the proper man to ask concerning a shearers' character as he sat in his shirt sleeves and a yeast of paper, and swore at Haddington and the mosquitos under heated breath.

Haddington wore evening clothes, and his hair was sleeked to attune his soft voice. He lounged at the wide-flung French window, and Frazier, running up a list of account sales, paused with his finger on a line to answer.

"Kin? Oh, Kin Severne? Lanky black-headed chap—shears at the end on the port side? Yes; what about him?"

"He writes—occasionally, and luridly."

"Bah! Those fellows are the curse of the country! The papers, I suppose. Cracking up some blessed union or other, I'll go bail."

"Not exactly." Haddington smiled to remember. "What is he like, Frazier? Is he—ah—steady?"

"Steady? I don't know. He's pretty handy with his fists, and his tongue, Clarke says. He can shear. That's all I want."

Frazier checked a row of figures, crushed a mosquito with the butt of a memo-form, and fell to work again.

"Ah," said Haddington slowly, and sucked his cigarette, assorting memories with care.

The Hindoos have invented a particularly ghastly and effective method for fighting the demons that come with sleep in the night-time. It has the recommendation of being a very simple method, for it is just a spear or a long-rowelled spur or a thorn fixed endwise in the curve of the charpoy—which is to say—bed; but the man who falls to sleep on that bed must beforehand be very unequivocally dead.

It had occurred to Haddington that this Australian might be worked more easily and safely on the spur-and-charpoy system, and he was glad that he had thought of it when he set Kin opposite him in the full lamp glare of Frazier's dining room.

Kin had come in the puerile belief that the issue of this thing lay entirely in his own hands; but when Haddington led up to the subject as a maze leads he began to lose temper. Then the elder man made his point suddenly,

"Before your work goes on the market, Kin, it will need refining. It is rough, and—ah—crude, and very bitter. It leaves a nasty taste in the mouth."

Kin knew that this was untrue. It is only uncleanness does that.

"All kinds o' work is crude at first tryin'," he said. "You start off wi' naked truth, an' by the time you've learnt to cover it up with art you've lost a lot o' the truth. An' truth's the biggest thing—if you can fix it up in the proper grammar style."

"Exactly," said Haddington gravely. "I am glad

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you recognise that. Undressed truth is—ah—it has no sale in this world.”

Kin’s fingers twitched.

“It’s none so easy to tell truth from lies, when they’re both dressed up to the knocker.”

“You think that?” Haddington lay back in his chair and pulled the ears of Frazier’s collie pup. “How high do you mean to aim?” he asked abruptly. “I take no count of men who shoot their birds sitting.”

“I’m goin’ to the top,” said Kin, and straightened under the lash of the thought.

“Gad! I believe you are,” murmured Haddington; “if blatant self conceit will get you there. Kin, others have said that—and have missed. Going to the top means that you must give the best that is in you to the world again and again. It means that you must eat bread in the sweat of your brows all your days. It means that you must do it, and keep on doing it though it hurts; and if I know anything of men, it will hurt—often. And it is neither a sure nor certain way of making money. The half-way house pays better.”

Haddington did not know that Kin was calling him an ignorant old windbag under irreverent breath. For Kin’s spoken words were charged with earnest heat.

“Money,” he said. “Great Scott!—Money! I don’t think you do know much about men, you know. I want to talk to the world and make it listen. That’s what I want. Besides, it’s generally the philanthropist johnny who reckons to make the money, ain’t it?”

Haddington would make Kin pay for this another day. But that must wait.

“To go security for a stranger savours of weakness, unless you are sure the stranger is not going to be a—ah—failure.”

Kin looked past the window to the great distance where men had fought their pain and their passions on bare and vivid paths, and his eyes darkened with a slow wonder.

“Can a fellow be sure of anythin’ under the sun?”

“Certainly. The man that faileth, he shall die. The world has no use for him. The man with your ability is sure of success—if he—ah—puts his back into his work. I should need that assurance from you if I helped you. I will not be godfather to a failure.”

“I ain’t particular keen on being a failure myself.” Kin raised his head swiftly. “I’ve had no schooling since I was eleven, an’ if you give it me I’ll work—up to the collar. But I’ll work because I want to, an’ not for fear o’ you. An’ that’s the best word you’ll get.”

“I could hardly desire more.” Haddington’s mouth smiled, but the expression did not extend to his eyes.

“What are you getting at, then? You won’t bounce me. Look here, Haddington, if you’re wantin’ to work me an’ my stuff why can’t you come to it and stop all that rottin’?”

Kin had his voice under guard, but this was trying him sorely. His work and his pride, his desire and his distrust of the sleek man in the leathern chair pulled him separate ways, and he had to discern the right and the wrong of it for himself.

“Then,” Haddington lit another cigarette, “this is my offer. I will take you out of this existence, and do for you what money and influence can do. But I must have my price.”

“Well? It’s you to throw.”

“If we make a deal I cannot be bought off later. You understand that? I never go back on a bargain, and—ah—I expect you to stand to your share of it.”

"Wi' this ring I thee wed," quoted Kin derisively. "Get along with your game, then; you haven't proposed yet."

"What do you hope to make of your life on its present lines, Kin?"

Kin was kneeling with one knee on the chair, and his rough hands gripped on the back. He looked on other lives that he had known, and he saw the disillusionment that comes in the night, and the recklessness that makes for drink or death, and that often ends in both. And he knew that he was no better than other men.

"If you'll give me my chance I'll pay—whatever you want."

Haddington sat very still. He desired control of this man intensely, because he believed that he was a man of his word. Besides, mentally and physically, he was strong, and this dual strength can make or overturn most things. Haddington knew it, and he pushed out his shorings carefully, that all might be firm.

"You will need a year at college, I think. A year of hard work. Then perhaps a little journalism; there is nothing makes a man so many-sided as journalism. And you will not put your name to any stuff that does not pass through my hands until I think fit. I bear all expenses, and take half profits of such work as is placed. After three years your work should be assured, and we will rearrange matters. I am going to be very lenient with you, Kin, and—ah—perhaps I shall expect a little more than ordinary gratitude."

"That's not all," said Kin, watching closely.

"Ah—no; that is not quite all. There have been men who were content to—ah—live on others. To use the fire of their genius for—ah—burning bills and lighting cigars. If you turn out to be a man of this stamp I—ah—fall in, as you may say."

Kin rose, with his head braced stiffly.

"If I was a man o' that stamp," he said, "I'd probably knock your head off. But I'm wanting what you've got to give too much for that. I give you my word of honour that I'll play fair."

Haddington joined his finger tips softly.

"I never take any man's word of honour, nor do I ever give my own. I consider that it is—ah—stretching the obligations of civility too far. Besides, it is not business."

"What in thunder d'you want, then? A fellow can't stake more than his word."

"No? Then we will be content with something less—something in writing. Suppose we draw up a little contract, and sign it for our private satisfaction. Something like this, for instance."

He wrote a few lines in his pocketbook, and tossed the thing across the room. Kin caught it and read it, with the blood running into his forehead and darkening his neck veins. Haddington had set down his offer briefly, with the sting in the tail of it.

" . . . And if the said Kin Severne fail to profit by my assistance during the three stated years he himself is forfeit to me. Signed . . ."

"What does this rot mean?" said Kin, between anger and grins.

"Perhaps much. Perhaps little. I merely desire security. If you fail as a writer I get my returns in other ways. I may want to use you as a battering ram, or—ah—a step-ladder. Or I can adopt you and make you the son of my old age."

Haddington smiled pleasantly. Kin flung the book on the table, and it skidded with crushed leaf to the floor.

"I'm hanged if I'll sign that," he said.

Haddington lay back and yawned.

20 The Bondage of Kin Severne

"As you please. I have constantly observed that a man is infinitely more ready to—ah—pledge his soul than his body. Either he considers the former a less valuable asset, or else he is aware that he—ah—does not possess one."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Kin wrathily.

"You offered me your soul this afternoon as proof that you meant what you said. Just now you offered me your word of honour. But you refuse to pledge your body. It is refreshing to remember that Shakespeare once knew a man whose honour and life were of equal interest to him. I have never——"

Then Kin swore, tersely and very fervently, and went straightway out into the moonlight.

The moon was china white, and the size of a wash-basin in the far-off uninterested sky. The earth was still and empty; hard, shadowless, without peace and without comfort to give to her son when he came to her for guidance.

Kin walked dizzily down to the shingle bank of the drying Warrego, and the whole world was heavy on him in the relentless light.

"A man's life's his own," he said defiantly. "It's worth the chancin'." And again: "That fellow ain't clean straight through. If he wants me to do dirty work——" And yet again: "There's goin' to be drought this year. The smell of it's on things a'ready. Work'll be scarce—an' I got sandy blight last time I went over the border."

Kin walked the bank until the gum leaves to the left made fretwork across the moon's face. Then he went back, as Haddington knew he would.

"Put a time limit to that fake-um an' I'll sign it."

"You—ah—fully understand it?"

"Any fool could do that. How many years d'you want?"

Haddington considered. But it was not necessary. The Australian had stood the test which the other man would have burked, and that was all he wanted yet.

"Jacob served seven years for Rachel. If you fail me in these coming three, you serve me for seven more. Will that do?"

Kin bit his lip, and for a moment his eyes were boyish and full with trouble. But he nodded.

Haddington made the alteration, signed it, and Kin re-read it in silence. Then he wrote his name swiftly, snapped the book, and gave it into Haddington's hands.

"There you are! You've got me safe enough, anyway! And now, I'll just tell you. I don't care a dump for your interests, or my own life or soul, or anythin' but my work. I wouldn't put myself in the power of any man living but for my work. There's no question of obligating each other 'bout this. I'll be worth it to you. You've got me down for a darnation big sum, an' I took the bet to show that I don't count nothin' more bindin' than my word—which I gave you before. That's all. An'—do you think you understand a bit more 'bout me now, eh?"

"Yes," said Haddington, withholding a desire to call Kin by several names. "Yes; I think we understand each other now."

Kin's armour was on again, and his eyes showed nothing.

"I'm glad o' that. Hope we'll be good friends, and all that sort of thing. An' I think I'd like a copy o' that little paper. Just to keep my mem'ry waking, y'know."

Haddington re-wrote the form.

"You know something of business," he said, with a constrained smile. "So much the better for me."

22 **The Bondage of Kin Severne**

"An' for me too, I reckon," retorted Kin, pocketing the paper. "When does it come into force?"

"When do you finish here?"

"We'll cut out in ten days with luck. I've engaged for a little shed at Poddo—'bout a fortnight, p'raps. I could come then."

"That will do. We can arrange details later. Good-night, Kin."

"Good-night," said Kin airily. "I guess we've taken each other for better or worse this time, Haddington. An' it's so nice to think neither of us can back out on his lone, ain't it?"

He vanished swiftly as he had come; and Haddington, lighting one more cigarette, found that it was very good.

"He means it. And it will pay—it will pay twice."

Kin went past the noisy huts, and the sheds, where restless shadows of sheep made murmur in the yards; past the gabble of the Warrego, telling of its stones in nightly prayer.

Out on the plain half-stripped bark beat on the gum-tree boles with a slow regular throb, like the very ghostly echo of galloping horses. He stumbled over the dried grass, and dropped on the smother of leaves as a tree-foot to thresh out the meaning of this new thing. But there dislike of Haddington, and all the several grim chances that a man must take, fell away from him.

Under the white moon and the silent knotted gum trees, where the shadow of blood and lust and love of a dying race had gone by, he lay still. And it was clean joy that came to him, with no fear of the future. For that was not his breed.

Then he sat up with all the strength of his half-raw manhood flung forward to face the life to be—the life that waited.

How the Spur Was Set

23

“For it’s big,” he said. “It’s the biggest thing God gives a chap. To make the world see things clean or dirty, or good or bad, just as he likes to show ’em. And I can do that. I’ve paid for the right. And it hurt! Gad, it did hurt. But I’m going to wipe that off now. I’m going to talk to the people of the earth. I am—off my own bat.”

CHAPTER II

KIN SEVERNE—WAR CORRESPONDENT

"AND the Man," said Kin, speaking in capitals from the doorway, "said—'The Onion and the Potato do good unto the World, and receive no admiration therefrom. But the Lily of the Field, being idle, is put into Flower vases, and eke into the Bible. And therefore, that such Glory may come upon me, I will toil not, neither spin—save Yarns.' And so saying, the Man betook him to a Club and loafed. Whereupon, by order of the Gods, the Club smote him that he died."

The Man in the Club opened one eye and yawned unabashed, for he had good teeth.

"And on the following day the diligent and virtuous Potato was smitten by a Spade—and cooked—and eaten. Whereupon the Lily said: 'Herewith I get the pull.' Ring 'em up, Kin."

"Or the results of it." Kin jerked the bell rope, came across and spread himself on the sofa.

The man opened the other eye.

"You're positively bloated with arrogance," he murmured. "Killed Drogan?"

Drogan of the *Boomerang* office had set up an article for Kin with not more than six clerical errors to the page, for which reason Kin had gone forth with intent to slay.

"No. Couldn't find him. Dick, there are even better things than thumping a Drogan unofficially. A free hand, for example, and the wherewithal to play it——"

“And whiskey. Thanks. Put it here. You take soda in yours, Kin? What was the little game?”

Dick brought himself into a sitting posture, and grinned comfortably across the bamboo table. He was full-blooded, and the red-brown of his skin was ten shades darker than his tousled hair and twinkling grey eyes.

At the edge of the shadow lined by the low-turned light arc Kin stretched a muscular hand for glass and bottle. The skin of it had bleached with the indoor work of his life, and the man himself had softened and broadened. But the devil of a steady fulfilling purpose sat under his heavy eyebrows, and his jaw was firmer.

“The stake was my marching orders, and the game was Bluff. And I won.” Kin chuckled at the remembrance. “Yes; I won.”

“Did you ever do anything else—at Bluff? What is it, Kin?”

“War correspondent—no less. Quite time, too. I’m getting stale in this——”

“It is exactly seven weeks,” remarked Dick, mixing whiskey and water impartially, “since you came back from Melbourne.”

“It is exactly seven months since you lost your powers of deduction—if you ever had ’em. I can truthfully say that since I’ve known you I have never seen you draw any kind of conclusion except with a corkscrew.”

“Go it,” said the peaceable Dick. “What’s wrong now?”

“It’s a plethora of cities that’s wrong with me. Cities—and citizens—and gentle tongues—and all the evils of a circumscribed life. You,” said Kin, throwing a crumpled envelope at a cat that had grown out of the night on the stairway—“you may go home and give thanks that your forebears never considered civilisation.

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It's a poor improvement on the primeval system, Dickie."

"The Paroo," said Dick finally; "and a bluey with a tin billy a-top."

"No. I told you. It's Samoa, an' a shindy, and truthful weekly letters for the *Boomerang* and an up-country rag that the boss feeds occasionally. He was going to send Carton—and Carton's a good man, if he does turn out vile journalese; but——" Kin paused to empty his glass, and Dick laughed with a deep chuckle.

"But instead he is going to send a bad man who turns out good journalese, eh? How did you work it, mad-man?"

"Carton fuked—just a bit. Has a family, y'know. I managed to buy him off (it was not necessary to repeat the words of the grateful Carton), being rather keen on rows myself. There will be," he frowned reflectively, "there will be the deuce of a row when I break this to Haddington. He is very tender about my welfare, Dickie. And if I go to Glory and a grave I think he won't like it. But he's got no pull on my work since he handed me over to Muir. To-morrow I must buy me some shooting-irons and a dictionary book. Grand language, the Samoan, for a fellow who is a bit on. You use the *l* for the Maori *r*, and a kind of a hiccup for *k*, and repeat most of the syllables twice. Not that I know much about Maori either, but there's a half-caste stoker on the *Chillabong*, and I'm going in her—to-morrow night."

"You'll be killed instantly, you know. And the *Chillabong* goes to Suva. Ordinary traffic's cut to Upolu. Even I have observed that."

"There are ways," said Kin darkly. "I'm going—and so are you. B'lieve you'd pay better than a dictionary."

Kin Severne—War Correspondent 27

Dick cast aside the evening's paper and sat up.

"You have brazen cheek," he said slowly. "I'm not going. I'll see you considerably hanged first."

Kin crooked his arm under his head, and fixed his eyes on the soft dusks of the stairway. These sort of places hold pictures for them that can see.

"There's a yarn of Stevenson's," he said; and spoke softly, lingeringly, and for the space of five minutes, to the benefit of the man who had been there before—and had forgotten.

There was love in that story of Stevenson's, and a blood feud; a silver waterfall laced over red stones, and dropping through heavy bush of copper tints and iron black; warm wind in the cocoanut palms, and sharp issues of life and death running under the soft laughter of Samoan girls.

Kin told it cunningly, that it should trouble the heart of the other man. And Dick moved uneasily, remembering. The blood thickened by lazy days of hospital and convalescence was stirred, and his breath came quicker.

"It's distinct madness. And, by all the laws of reason, I've been killed once already this year. Besides—how'd we get there, Kin?"

"Canoe, catamaran, tramp, or swim. There are seventy-five different ways of getting there. And more, too. Say the word, Dickie. You very nearly didn't have the chance, you know."

There was a brief episode attached to this chance. It concerned a rowboat run down by a tug in a sudden fog off Middle Harbour. At that particular æon of time Dick belonged to the rowboat, and Kin was in the nose of the tug; and it so happened that a friendship sprung, unlawfully and without due introduction, from a broken leg and a general interest in mankind. The hospital and the things Kin found there fused the friend-

ship, and Dick rubbed the mended bones, grunting reflectively.

“Go an’ look at your picture book for five minutes, and le’me think. What a confounded nuisance you are, anyhow.”

He shut his eyes, and proceeded with hidden eagerness to adjust certain matters which should have drawn him back to his New Zealand home last week.

Kin tugged the window curtains to left and right, and leaned out into the very hot night. The full moon was yellow in smoke and haze from the whole turgid throbbing veins of Sydney, proper and improper.

Kin had seen the round disc of her fifteen times since that night on which he had handed himself bound to Haddington. And always she had read him, faithfully and unswervingly, the Communion Service from the Prayer Book because that he lay under the harrow of a man who was going to make a profitable corner out of him, not at all understanding the dignity of labour. But the moon did not comprehend that Kin had weekly washing bills and daily appetites, and that these things must go on though the stars stand still.

So Kin passed through his college life, working savagely and strenuously, and fell therefrom into reporter’s place on the *Boomerang*, where he served Muir in eager joy and won himself the name of “Wildcat” among men of his craft through the swift cunning whereby he nosed out and pounced on such savoury scraps as suited his paper.

And at times, in the early mornings, when he made his own private little stories up under the housetop, with only the breathing sleep of the city to touch him, he got very near to that happiness which God gives every true craftsman just once or twice in his life, to teach him—clear and straight and for ever—the reverence for Creation and the Created.

Kin Severne—War Correspondent 29

But Kin was not reverencing the Created as he hung out of the Club window, and whistled snatches of music-hall songs, for he knew rather more than enough concerning the life that surged through the sultry night below the chimney pots.

In the street angle a Salvation Army—forty strong—were praying for the publican at the corner; their dull reds and blues and the warm slaty tints of the loafers along the pavement brought together and spread by the crimsons and purples of a chemist's window.

A drag came in from Redfern with a cargo of rowdy footballers. It dashed in and out of vision as magic-lantern slides pass, putting out all but the raucous voices of the prayers in ropy yellow dust.

A playhouse tragedy was being enacted for Kin's benefit under the immediate light post. Or was it a comedy? "They both end in dy," moralised Kin, "which in the translation is die, so what does it matter?" But he watched, all the same.

Comedy was a larrikin of Sydney's particular brand, and a girl in a draggle gown and love was with them. So much was patent and tediously common. Tragedy splashed into the shallows of brighter light. It was dual. A stolid face under a policeman's helmet, and a stolid but compelling hand on the larrikin's shoulder. The other Tragedy wore a white, wild face and a be-feathered hat, and shrieked, selling the man to the Law with a shrill tongue.

"Bah!" said Kin; "jealousy." And he marvelled at the logic of a woman's love.

The warring lights from a string of theatre carriages blurred all; and the man at the window above drew in his head with a grunt suggestive of knowledge of these things seen on the undertow.

"Pictures not pretty to-night?" inquired Dick.

"Not here. And go thou into the side slums and

by-ways, and thou shalt find them a darned sight worse. When I was Out-Back I was in a better place."

"There's an interesting postscriptum to that final remark in this evening's *Star*." Dick sat up and groped under his chair. "Here you are. Drought increasing on the Queensland border. Dargoon Station gone under. St. Hill committed suicide."

Kin shivered. St. Hill was known as a "real white man" to them of the track.

"He's been running for the jump into the dark all through. Ran straight, though. Wonder what Mrs. St. Hill—chuck that paper over, Dick. By jove, I'm sorry for her."

"A single man's at perfect liberty to put himself out—provided he's game to take his chances in the next world. But a chap with a family deserves to be blackballed by Satan himself. He's a slinking coward. Yes," said Dick positively, "a slinking coward—though I knew St. Hill and liked him."

"I knew his hut cook," said Kin. "He made kapai stews."

"I meant to go up to Dargoon 'fore I went home," remarked Dick. "But now, of course—" he followed up a train of thought and added: "Jo will look after Doody, and Doody will look after Mr. Tubbs, and the run can look after itself, as it has done before. . . . And you'll upset Samoan history without a drag on you, Kin."

"You seem to have a large and complicated family, old man."

"Jo," explained Dick, "lives over the river from my place. She's—she's a girl, and you can't tabulate her. Doody is Dudysle when he signs his name in birthday books, and Mr. Tubbs is a pure-blooded fox-terrier. You'll know 'em all when you come to stay

with me. Say, d'you think a chap could pack a Lee-Metford and a sufficiency of cartridges and a few other toys so they'd look like a hand camera?"

"Pack 'em to look like a handkerchief," asseverated Kin joyously. "Trail has got the very——" Then they slid into peaceful technicalities until some men came in from the theatres, to drive them out by talk anent the dead St. Hill and his private life.

The crowd was muddier than it had been an hour past, for the dregs drain out of the streets latest. There is a moral leprosy in some Australasian towns, bred by the convicts, the lifers, and other jailbirds which were England's first gift to a clean country, and Kin had watched very often, in the dark between night and morning, for the unholy shrivelled human things that Life had forgottèn, and Death was too squeamish to come for.

The good people of Sydney had gone home to their beds, and there was an incredibly ancient and battered man-shape in the gutter alongside Dick, poking his blind way with a stick, and gurgling scraps of a prison chorus born with the century.

A "push" of larrikins blocked the way, and Kin gave them tongue for tongue as he shouldered through with the disgusted Dick behind. A bundle of black draperies gibbered and tossed skinny arms, and flickered down a side alley where no light was; and in the broad shadows of the National Bank a girl clutched Dick's arm with feeble fingers and the professional beggar's whine. Dick broke his patter of jovial talk to shake her off roughly. He had a hate of creeping things, and plunged into the flood of light beyond in haste.

Kin pulled up, and looked on the pitiful lines of the dead-white flesh.

"What do you want?"

The girl was hurling maledictions down the street.

32 **The Bondage of Kin Severne**

“He—he calls hisself a gentailman. He’s the sort as maikes——”

“Leave him alone. What did you want?—Money, of course.”

Kin slid his hand into his pocket, and the girl drew back.

“Not give like that. I ain’t a dorg. An’ even a dorg laikes a pat on the head with his boane at taimes.”

The slow nasal twang and the weak flutter of woman’s assertion put pathos to the bald words. Kin pulled out some silver.

“Here—take it,” he said gently. “Yes; it’s all right. I’ve begged in Sydney myself, and I know. And—er—there’s a doss-house down Marven Street—you know it? Go straight there, then. Do you hear?”

The girl lifted sullen rebellious eyes.

“That’s none of your business. I shawn’t.”

“You’re truthful, anyway. Then I’ll have to take you. Come on.”

“I’m blowed if you will. Leave me be. Yes; I’ll go.”

“Honour bright?”

Her eyes sought Kin’s in amazement. Then they dropped.

“Yes,” reluctantly; “s’welp me I will, Mister.”

Kin watched her go, and Dick, kicking the curb viciously, called him an amazing idiot.

“Now I understand,” said Kin profoundly, “why City—Councillors go to bed early.”

“They can’t help it, gentle souls. We will have the liberty of the subject in the Colonies. Kin, did any one ever make you go to bed early when you were a little boy?”

Kin cast his mind back through the grey unlovely years.

“Never. Yes; there was a kind of guardian once.

Kin Severne—War Correspondent 33

He died, and I rejoiced roundly—catharine wheels in the yard, I think. But that was in the Stone Age, and out of memory.”

“What did you give that girl pennies for?”

“She was a type,” said Kin, smoking placidly.

“Oh, a type! Great Scott! Am I a type too?”

“I thought so. When I found you were copyright I had to make a friend of you instead. You were useless for other purposes.”

“If you’d talk English! Who has copyrighted me?”

“Mediocrity,” said Kin, with a grin. “You needn’t raise your hand to smite. You have just built yourself on the same plan as a million men more, and you’ll all go to Heaven or the other place in a bunch if you’re not saved. Which would be undignified. So I’ll save you by taking you to Samoa. They are down at the bed rock of things there, just now. You are too fat and egotistical, Dickie. That’s what’s the matter with you.”

“You were a sledge hammer in the Stone Age,” said Dick; “and not a catharine wheel at all. I wonder why I like you, Kin.”

“I pander to your egotism,” explained Kin blandly. “I let you think that you are necessary to me, and you’ll never understand that it is I who am necessary to you. And you can go to bed on that, my son. Don’t want me before noon to-morrow, for you won’t get me. I’m not on duty to-night; but there’s a special—Oh crumbs! Is that the time!”

At top of the steep street he plunged up the steeper staircase to his room; turned on the light, and swore at the smothering heat that met him. The mosquito curtains were drawn in his outer den, and the floor and table were littered with papers.

“Now, where the deuce is that copy,” said Kin,

raking cheerfully among them with both hands. "Ah, um-m. 'According to the statistics——' Gad! Muir will be in a wax!"

He made a swift end of the last civilian report that would vex his soul for days and days and days, stuffed it into his pocket, and fled down street to the office. In a half hour he came back; flung off his coat and went to his private work with a chuckle. ". . . For you've never a wife to tie you by the tail, old chap. Stick to your impersonal goddess. She requires a man's brain only—and not his body."

Haddington had put Kin into the *Boomerang's* House of Correction just three months back; whereupon the boy promptly sloughed the propriety that he had wrapped round him at the college, and bloomed into a special reporter of virile and daring type. He was the darling of Muir's granite heart, and it was incidentally because of this that Muir had let him out on a good-conduct pass, with his probation not half served, and a whole constitutional deadlock for him to disentangle for the benefit of the public.

Kin had learnt very many things in these fifteen months. He naturally assimilated knowledge along all lines that touched him, and Haddington was already beginning to place his word with care. But there was that about the Australian boy which interested Haddington more. Kin's single-minded purpose drove him unshaken through the tideway of the passions and stubborn desires that were in his blood, and because all grip must strengthen the bodily or mental muscles Kin was developing a tenacious vivid power which bade fair to outrun all that Haddington had foreseen.

It did not seem quite so simple a thing to mouth Kin to the bit when occasion required, and it was three weeks since Haddington had last laid his hand on the

Kin Severne—War Correspondent 35

rein, trying to forget former attempts whereat the colt had kicked.

To begin with, he had climbed two flights of stairs, and disturbed Kin over the making of a sub-leader. This was unlawful and irritating. Kin had not been allowed to write one before, and consequently there was not space for any but himself in the room.

"What d'you want?" he demanded in open hostility.

Now, it was Haddington's custom to dabble in many things that brought him notoriety, and he generally managed to cover his mistakes decently. But a stumble made lately had become so far public that it required a strong pen to write him a clean bill. And he chose that Kin should be the writer.

This being a test case, he approached it with sugared words and hidden care.

"Ah—the *Mercury* editor asked me if I thought you would do him a column on that Bundalla Meeting, Kin. This being—ah—something rather special, he wanted a good man, and—ah—he will pay well. These fellows are beginning to understand the value of you now, you know."

Kin smelt battle.

"All serene," he said, tipping back his chair. "Those kind o' things want holding up to have rotten eggs chucked at 'em. It's Bavardia's foul at the half mile that's troubling him, of course. I'll put it pretty straight."

"No—no—ah—that is, I think you have got the wrong—ah—end of the stick. There was some unpleasantness over that race, and as one of the stewards I—"

"You feel a bit raw about it? Naturally. I'll get my knife into 'em. Darned trickery."

Kin smiled grimly; his eyes on Haddington's shuffling boots, and his ears pricked for the answer.

36 **The Bondage of Kin Severne**

"If you—ah—were anything of a sportsman, Kin, you would know that there was no fouling in that race. Being known to have backed St. Ayr myself, I particularly desire that this point should be emphasised. You—in fine—you will write this article at my dictation."

"You mistake," explained Kin, sorrowing that Haddington was not thirty years younger. "I don't write it at all."

Haddington drew a quick breath, and fight showed in his eyes. They were peculiar eyes, with the line of upper and lower lid cut straight across the curve of the pupil.

"You will write it, I say, to uphold the verdict following the protest. To——"

"To whitewash you. No!" Kin kept his hands still, but his chin twitched.

The level of Haddington's temper tipped.

"By ——, you will do as I tell——"

Kin got up swiftly, but Haddington should not have drawn back. It implied weakness. Besides, Kin did not mean to hit.

"I may not be much more of a stickler on points of morality than you are," he said slowly; "but inventing lies for someone else doesn't appeal to me, somehow. And yours would be clumsy. Besides—possibly you won't understand—but if a man smirches the only thing he has respect for, it—er—isn't very good for him. Bah," said Kin, in sudden loathing for the frock-coated thing that had come to trouble him; "you can't understand. I knew. Go away. I'm busy; and if you dare ask me to do your dirty work again I may forget that you are an old man and a very evil one, and—hit you rather hard."

He opened the door, and lapsed into the uneducated station drawl that Haddington hated.

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“Good-bye. I’ll send that column round to Porter in time. You’ll get it with your breakfast. And—as you can’t call in the mortgage on my body and soul yet, it might be as well that you shouldn’t try this kind of thing too often. Do you see?”

Haddington went out, bemazed and inarticulate and anxious, because he had not come out of this test with any satisfaction to himself, and his need for the use of Kin was daily growing more imperative.

Then Kin knelt to his Divinity, which was all the good work doing and to do, and gave thanks in that he had kept her pure. After which, being fortified, he pranced joyously among his papers and told the four walls and the hideous little ceiling ornament that he had been wise to teach Haddington these matters plainly.

“And having been joined together by the god of mutual convenience, no man can put us asunder till the time’s up. Gad; is it going to be a hot time, I wonder? Haddington’s a clever man, but he is not a nice companion for this child. No; he’s not a nice companion at all.”

Haddington was a clever man, according to his revolving lights. He cherished this memory, but he kept silence. For Kin was to win yet, and it was going to take Haddington all his craft to do it.

He placed Kin’s stuff with careful tact, and as it filtered slowly into the four corners of Australia it was not Haddington who stinted praise. And when with the column in the *Mercury* came a *Bulletin* story of Kin’s to his breakfast table, Haddington gave Kin fair words before all men. For the story was made of the art which lasts.

“Write in your youth,” a man had once told Kin; “before your illusions are worn out. You’ll need ’em

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to wrap the sordid things you see in, or you'll shock your world."

Kin had held to his illusions through the bitter life that had begun with fleece picking and ended with shearing. There were other things, too, belonging to those years, things that he did not speak of, but that had borne their part in the making of him, all the same.

The desire 'and the restlessness that trouble the hearts of the gypsies of the Track all through the world came upon him at times, and drove him out to the smell of gum-leaves in the gardens and the wave of long grass under sensuous sunlight. Here he avoided policemen, and heard with shut eyes the murmur of open plains. And, being a wanderer at soul, he had envious memories of the year when he humped his swag across to Ballarat, and washed gold, and wrestled outside the pubs with the best men that Victoria could bring. He had felled bush for hire more than twice; he had droved sheep along the Macquarie through a divine summer and an absolutely brutal autumn. And the rattle of a rifle stock in the bucket when a volunteer squad rode up the street to the clatter of hoofs stung him to actual pain with the longing of it. For he had served six months in the Mounted Police on the Adelaide side, and he knew the tongueing of black trackers in sight of the quarry.

But each season had flogged him back to the shearing shed, and through all he laid up treasure, lovingly, grimly, painfully, although he did not know.

Then, through God and Haddington, the time came for him to understand that he knew something of the souls of men, with their brutality, and their generous help one for another, and their loves and hates. And this knowledge took contempt of the little things

out of his soul; for it was a clean soul, and the baser temptations fell away from it, because of the spirit of the work worshipper that lived there.

Outside, in the chimney-pot world, the black paled to dun; the sun unshut his fingers, and poked the eyes out of all the stars, and it was dawn.

Kin, beginning to realise that he was sleepy, laid aside a half-finished sketch for the *Queenslander*, and watched the making of a new day out of a seething chaos of mist.

"Hail Cæsar!" he cried to the strengthening orange light; "those about to live salute thee." And he went to bed to dream that he had slain Haddington with a boomerang, and buried him in Samoa.

That morning he took the launch across to North Shore, and discovered Haddington in the hotel garden that met the stretch of blue silken water. "Here's the last of that series for the *Examiner*," said Kin, dragging a package from his pocket. "An' you can get those mining articles when you want 'em. They're filed at the office. Muir knows about 'em."

"You are contemplating suicide, perhaps?" suggested Haddington, turning among the lemon trees.

"Not just now. Later on, I may. But I'm going to Samoa first. To-night, if you'd like to know."

"Samoa," said Haddington, and dropped into his chair with a face that made Kin whistle softly. "Samoa! You—you are joking, Kin. You—ah—you can't—you—you know nothing of Samoa. You are not—not——." He put a dead cigarette between his lips, and bit on it to steady himself.

The game had been played so far that Kin might oversee all that was being done for Haddington in Samoa and in other South Sea islands. But Kin was not fit to know of this yet. Besides, some little incidents connected with the present war had made

it undesirable that a man with eyes and ears and a knowledge of Haddington should go there to play. Reflecting, Haddington sat in his cane chair and felt very sick. The fast-held dislike, each man to each, was raw beneath the bandage of common use, and Kin grinned unkindly, watching.

“(Looks as if that was a nasty one for him. What’s he got to do with Samoa, I’d like to know.) I say, Haddington, ain’t you going to wish me good luck, eh?”

“But—but this is nonsense, man. I—ah—refuse to—I cannot consciously allow you to run into any kind of danger——”

“You should say that on your knees,” remarked Kin derisively. “It belongs to the Prayer Book, Haddington, and I belong to the *Boomerang*. You have no pull over me till I begin to go wrong. An’ I don’t mean to go wrong. See?”

Haddington, looking at the long lean limbs and the line of the mouth, laid his hands on Kin’s arm in cringing fear; for this man was strong, too strong, and it was not politic to fight with him.

“Kin, my dear boy, this is not necessary. I will speak to Muir. You must give it up, Kin. I am an old man, and you are like a son to me——”

Kin chuckled in his throat. He had heard this talk before.

“I go for information, my father. You have taught me how to acquire it. Still shall I eat bread in the sweat of my brow, you know.”

“Anywhere else. Not in Samoa. Not yet. By —, you shan’t go there.”

Kin moved back a pace.

“When you talk like that,” he said, “I begin to think you’re not a clever man at all. You hit too hard to bounce anythin’ but a tennis ball. Why are you afraid that I should go to Samoa, Haddington?”

"I am not afraid——"

"Yes, you are," said Kin steadily. "You are in a beastly funk. Perhaps I shall find out why in a little while. Then you'll have only yourself to thank if I show you up, you know. You put me on the scent."

"You—ah—have no common decency—you have no gratitude——"

"I haven't. Not a penny-weight. You took me up as a speculation, and as a speculation I'm going to pay you—better than ever you guessed. You only give me money, and you'll only get money back. Well?"

Then Haddington gave him hard words, such as were rare even to Kin's cultured mind. And Kin, understanding from this that there was something big awaiting, departed in ribald joy to find Dick.

Dick, having ransacked twenty-six shops for iron-mongery, purred ecstatically over the acquirement of a couple of Colt revolvers with the very latest patent ejectors and perfect bore.

"Chucks the cartridge to glory, and comes back for another 'fore you know where you are," he explained, with complicated finger motions; and Kin grunted with his back turned.

For this was the third time of telling, and they were dropping down harbour swiftly, with Sydney flinging her strung beads of rust-red and amber light round all the headlands to hold them, and it was not an hour for talk. Besides, Kin had handled those Colts himself.

With the red light of Fort Denison to starboard, the *Chillabong* slipped swiftly past craft of sorts that bucked and snorted after the manner of gritty blunt-nosed ferryboats, or screamed in shrill red rage, or plunked by in heavy silence, according as Providence

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had ordained them for passenger boats or for the grimy bearers of licensed cargo.

Past Bradley's Head the salt wind came to their lips with its promise of the sea, and, at all points of the compass, the world was going to sleep in fleecy blankets of mouse colour and rippled gold.

Dick went below before the scarlet and arsenic-green flashes from signal points had told off all the lower reaches and left them to the shadows ahead. But Kin stood in the stern and chewed a thought until he had seen the blue light on the North Point veer and shake and crumble out in the dark.

Then he shook himself and perambulated the deck in vainglory and an excitement that was altogether new, for the sea trail gripped into his marrow with careless half-shaped tales of unspeakable wonder. And the *Chillabong* drove on through the black welter of night, climbing the crests that met her, and flinging them behind with a joy that thrilled her every timber.

For the great voice of the world was calling her also.

CHAPTER III

“THERE WILL BE HADDINGTON TO RECKON WITH PRESENTLY”

THERE was night on the Ifi-Ifi Road. Behind, the lights of Apia tailed out with the last yellow candle sputter from the Supreme Court windows. Before, the palms rose up, stretching eastward past the Tivoli, away and far off to Vailete and to starlight on a wide still sea. But it was black, close night in the Ifi-Ifi where the clash of carefully nursed steel struck above the quick patter of a line of men running by; unseen, purposeful, and stripped for fight.

In the forefront footsteps beat evenly, with the spring and soft flap-flap which, all the world knows, belongs to bluejackets going past at the double. Followed a handful of Friendlies—Malietoans—Upholders of the Rightful King. They had as many names again; and more. And through the night they were just a hidden river rippling by on bare silent brown toes, and preserving no discipline whatsoever. The rear rank was heavily booted, and stumbled in painful protest against noise until the clean ring of the coral road gave to spongy softness of vegetation.

Kin dropped into the tide as it flowed past the Supreme Court doors. He had done a two-hours' trick of hospital work in the fetid steaming room, and his lungs were sick for the breath of the sea and land. When the track swung inward across the Vaisingano he ranged blindly alongside a voice that was evidently having

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trouble with accoutrements, and proceeded to find out things.

"This is the phantom army that comes down Majuba every night. What's it doing in Upolu, Spirituous One?"

"Guess the spirits are behind," answered the voice. "Smell 'em. What are you doing along here, anyway? —Severne, isn't it? Well, but we're not taking partners to the ball to-night. We're going right in to do some back scratching."

Kin put an American name and a naval profession to the strenuous presence that loped beside him.

"Let me come too," he pleaded. "I'll have to write you up if you're wiped out, Hetton; and I want to see how you do it."

Hetton grinned, fumbling his cartridge belt.

"Well, sir; if it isn't my funeral, I'm not going to be responsible for yours, anyhow. You trail out on your own, and don't cuss more'n you can help if you get landed in a tight place. There's too much reporter round this business already, Severne. Shouldn't wonder if there were more of you along right now."

"No more should I," said Kin serenely. "Say; I've done this before—in a nightmare."

"Done what?"

"Run away from nothing through nothing into nothing, with all earth's darkness tied round my neck——"

"Don't you make any mistake. It's not nothing we're running into to-night. Eh? Don't you wish you may get it. Go and chew Bresser's ear, an' see what you'll make of him. But there's this much to it, Severne. The bush around is reeking with white-caps, and as you're here I reckon you'll have to stay. Got anything to work with?"

"Revolver," said Kin laconically; "and fists. I shall be all right."

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He was alive to the last tingling nerve in his body, and drunk with a full unexplainable content such as comes to the fighting breed at the clink of steel and the smell of war. Seven days in Samoa had made far more of this, and his writings for the week were laid, love offerings, to the Goddess Kali.

Through these days Dick had scoffed, and drank kava, and loafed in the gun-rooms of every warship in harbour. He had kissed all the pretty girls that sat along the piers like rows of bright-winged parrots, and picked up some of a beachcomber's knowledge of laziness and love of license. He had dabbled his fat hands in lifeblood, and learnt to fix a bandage after a fashion that made the surgeons curse. And when the sound of the hollow drum called Bresser's water carrier from the shifting crowd about the International Hotel, Dick had snatched up a rifle and run with her, a wreath of scarlet and yellow hibiscus flapping round his neck and down his back, and the sob of men's heavy chest-breathing coming to him along the road. In the mast-high bush on the Matautu the dark pressed the unseeing eyes with solid fingers. Swell and thickness of trees shut out the salt air, and the warm sickliness of rotting vegetation rose and sweated in the close track. Hetton, pumping his second wind out in gasps, chuckled, and cuddled the sword in his arm-pit.

“Bresser's right on to it to-night. He can see more in the dark than another chap with an arc-light. He can sniff the first smell of a white-cap——” Hetton's teeth clipped on the word, and Kin heard him swear, brief and suddenly. From a tree-top to the right a Snider exploded, presumably without intent. But the single shot that cracked sullenly in answer went out in a screech of rifle fire that tore the left flank of the night into ribbons of flame.

The van crumpled promptly, with native yells and

demoralisation. Up swept the rear rank, strong in the contempt of men who have faced death in the day and in the night without fear. Then, in all their tongues, Bresser's army began to make objections.

"Struck amidships, by jingo! A bally trap, and— What? What? Shut up, you darned fools, can't you."

Someone in the front was shouting a command. It was in nervous English, and very explicit.

"Open order, and double. Reserve fire."

In place of the swift patter of feet came the long windy hiss that belongs to rifle fire at close range. The roar of it turned Kin sick for an instant. Hetton drawled in his ear: "Bresser's made a fool break this time, an' if we don't keep our eyes skinned there'll be another d'reckly. Stand! you darned cowards! Stand, I tell you."

Kin halted with him for what was surely an eternity. But he knew the certain slaughter of volleys in a close formation. He had seen kangaroo shot in a drive.

To the lay mind there was not much charm in this thing. But it swung Kin into forgetfulness of self, and he made pictures of what the night held jealously. The navals were beyond swearing. He had seen the clean-shaped stern faces before, when the lips were tight-locked and the muscles throbbed in the sinewy throats, and he knew well that they would be paid for this. He had seen, too, the staring eyeballs and lolling tongues which assuredly belonged at this moment to the Friendlies, who—being as little children, and afraid of the spirits of the dark—cried out, and crushed on the blue-jackets in the narrow road that roared and choked with jostling men.

"Duck," said Hetton, "they're firing high. From the trees, cowardly brutes."

"It's a—a dambush," sobbed a mighty native,

struggling between the naked oily skins of his kind; and Kin laughed.

There is a heresy that a man in danger of death remembers his whole life back to his cradle days. Kin was in sore danger of death, and he remembered—the revolver at his belt. But, through the dark, Hetton spoke as if he knew. Perhaps his trigger finger itched also.

“If you shoot it’s all up, Severne. Mustn’t start a riot with this crowd around. They’d make each other into pepper boxes in no time. Curse those niggers in front. They’re piling up again. Hear ’em howl! Ten deep, I’ll bet my hat. That’s better,” as the crush loosened. “Forward, men. After me. Eh? Roads fork to the sea directly. We’ll form up there.”

“And,” said Kin with conviction, “we’ll square things when we do”; and he pitched headlong over something soft and limp that lay still, with an acrid newly familiar smell attached to it. His hands slipped in warm thick ooze, and his soul revolted and hardened as he got to his feet again.

“One of them. By Jupiter, Bresser won’t hold his men when next they get whiff of the brutes.”

For the red mouths spat still, and those who raged in bitter helplessness bore each other up toward the end where Bresser called.

“Twenty chain,” said Hetton, “and I’m blown. Here’s the fork, and, saints be thanked, popguns are run out.”

Bresser had got all but the tail end of his company into some sort of formation, and he was rapping out his orders with an edge to them. For there was the plunk-plunk of oars out on the sea beyond Vailete to be reckoned with first. This punishment must give way.

Someone lurched into Kin; and Kin, gripping at the bulk, laughed suddenly.

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"Dick, by all that's mad! Looking for your individuality, old man?"

"Don't know. I've lost the individual, anyhow. Brutally dark, isn't it? Here, hang it, man, where are you coming to?"

It was a bluejacket with a bullet through his groin. Dick got an arm round him, and heard the climax of Bresser's directions.

"—wounded will fall in, and march down to the main-guard huts. Corporal Roper in command."

The shoulder shifted, and departed from under Kin's hand.

"Dick! Are you hit?"

"Yes. Hold on, you Jack-ashore: I've got my own lead-mine to carry. You're comin' back with me, Kin?"

Kin was angry and amazed. No man has the right to turn another from his pleasure; and Kin never recognised obligations, either of give or take.

"Er—are you badly hit?"

"Yes," said Dick, lying cheerfully. "You keep out o' these silly rows, Kin, and come along home."

Bresser's men were moving forward, and the streak of the wild beast that was in Kin turned him to them in the narrow way.

"I—can't," he said. "They're goin' to fight. I'll be back before sun-up."

He crashed into the dark; and it was Bresser's water carrier who helped Dick back to the Supreme Court, and thereafter into many other things beside.

The bush was heavy and rank with rich smell of rotten bananas and mangoes. It was all tangled with rigging of knotted vines, and loathly with fungus that squatted along the branches exuding stench and drip. The track slid into a valley that quivered and seethed with a sickly phosphorescence which swamped, shadow-

less, the hard faces moving forward outstretched and ghastly.

From the valley top the great tree boles that pegged down the trembling light looked like a gridiron laid across the gate of Hell. The valley bottom sucked the bloodthirstiness from the men, and chilled them into silence. Kin was sweating with fear before they climbed again, with the pale horror streaming up behind them.

The fresh salt of the sea smote their faces, and the men savagely shook free from the clutch of the Underworld. Straight ahead, the shadow of turning surf lined the dark, and, down on the foreshore, faint grind of shells and seaweed mixed with the mutter of men's voices. Bresser had made his time quite perfectly.

“Men weren't very sweet on that, eh?” Hetton jerked his head back as he stood on the hillcrest. “You sit tight, Severne, and watch the cat jump. I want you to understand that there are going to be fireworks directly.”

“Contraband?” demanded Kin, breathing fast.

“You'd better believe it. From Sydney, the hogs. Listen!”

Far out in the tide of the reef-broken sea a British man-of-war hung on the flank of a schooner that showed light to friend nor foe. Nearer shore two cutters were hunting for the trail that would be the cutwater of a heavily laden boat.

The men strained in the leash of Bresser's voice, and the grate of ungreased rowlocks came up to them.

“Let 'em have it,” grunted Bresser; and brown and white swept down like a neap-tide to the shore.

Kin was gloriously happy. Back in the road gut he had felt the curiously detached sense of the onlooker. In the forest where the ghost light crawled he had guessed at the abiding place that dead men find—and dreaded it. But here was plain fighting, such as

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belongs by right to a man, and he went with the rest to get it.

Someone put light to a cluster of lianos that depended from a cocoa-palm, and the flame struck up, strong and lurid. The teeth of the breaking tide snapped at the boats where they grounded and swung and heeled, spilling over with marines, bluejackets, and the heavy bearded shapes which gave truth to the legend that Germans fought with Mataafa's rebels along the Apia side.

A seething rabble of bodies rolled in the sand and in the slime of seaweed. A Friendly, marked by his red handkerchief and cowrie shells, carried his death wound to the base of a slanting palm, and writhed there. In the bald flare of light Kin saw a marine rise up on the after davits of a boat and bring his oar down on the head of a white-cap with a noiseful smack.

"Levelling things up," said Kin grimly, and pulled the dying Friendly free of the trampling feet.

It was primitive fighting; speechless; filled with savage joy, and the use of shut fists, and the blaze of rifles that blackened bodies and faces with powder. Bresser had brought a light Gatling, but it squatted alone on the hill. The men would be paid in their own way for that blood letting along the Matautu, and there were no words would call them off yet.

A hail came over the water, followed by the chug-chug of the gunboat under Creagh.

"Right!—Right-o!" sang out someone. "We've got 'em safe enough." And then a red-hot agony seared Kin's striking arm from elbow to the joint of the neck. Eyes glared at him from behind choking smoke. He loosed his revolver at them, and they went out. But the squeal of bullets and the pressing, swirling sense of fight turned him suddenly giddy, so that he took three

steps, and dropped sideways into an emptied boat, horrible with blood and bilge-water. And as he fell he heard one of Bresser's men screaming: “A-e-e! Call on the spirits of your families to console your dying!”

Kin grinned; his face twisted with pain, and unconsciousness settling over him.

“But I haven't got a family,” he said.

The fighting centre eddied from the boats that were stripped of cargo, and, to the number of five, they lay, heeled and empty, in the palm shade. The German element began to draw off unobtrusively, gathering unbroken oars, muffling rowlocks, and gently dropping away along the beach line as the cutter came in with a dazzle of light and the little Hotchkiss sitting grimly forward in her bows.

The search light lapped up and down the shore, failing twice by a hair thickness to pick up the straining boats, and Bresser came down to the lip of the waves and asked questions.

“Where's that bally schooner? No; she won't get her boats back. What? No; her men either. We've got a handful, and the rest have cleared into the bush. What? Yes. Stores and ammunition. Yes; we'll bring our wounded aboard.”

“All serene. We'll stand by till morning.” Then the anchor chain rattled out, and the gunboat swung broadside on until the dawn, when Bresser discovered in white wrath that the schooner had undoubtedly got some of her boats again.

Hetton had been looking for Kin anxiously, and without result. For he was not in the trampled scrub rimming the sand where dark blood stains lay spread, nor was he back among the bullet-scored palms and trodden undergrowth.

“Drowned, or carried off in the boats,” said Bresser.

“Comes to the same in the end, I’m afraid. You’d no sort of right to let him come, Hetton, and you won’t make a general invitation affair of these things again. Do you understand?”

For he knew, and Hetton knew, that a man with the Malietoan red on him was more than like to lose his head along with his life when he came amongst Mataafa’s men.

Kin knew it too when he roused to slow painful understanding of the feet that trod on his body length where it lay in the bilge of the boat. The wetness and suck of the water struck his senses first. Then the low quick jabber of a foreign tongue that was not all Samoan, and the leap of the heavy craft in obedience to the long oar sweep.

An iron-shod heel ground into his shoulder, and he caught at it in waking fury, bringing the man down atop of him among the feet, where they fought with the blind animal savagery that lives in every man’s soul.

It was all the blackness of pain and God’s wrath to Kin, until someone smote him on the head with a thing that was blunt and numbing, so that he slid down and down, through the bilge water and the very floor of the sea, to bring up in a lightening whirling silence where bodyless heads stared at him, nodding, and a furnace lit itself in his right shoulder.

“Curse it,” he said, with stiff lips. “Can’t you take that fire away, some of you? Is it—did Haddington have me killed, after all?”

There was a flutter of light laughter and whispers; a rush of quick feet that made Kin think of scampering mice; a strange familiar smell of liniments, and then one face and figure that shaped from the haze with the sunlit background.

The figure wore a rusty soutane with a crucifix

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hanging across it, and the grey calm face was topped by the shorn priest's tonsure.

Kin gripped feebly at the bed of leaves and mats that seemed to have no security beneath him.

“What is it?” he asked. “Where am I? It—was it you I was walking into in the boat just now?”

The priest smiled, and his eyes were good to look at. But his English had the creak and halt of one long accustomed to sliding Island tongues.

“And it had been, I think it is I would be lying on these mats, my son. Laleefa—you there?”

There was more fluttering and giggles outside the range of Kin's vision; a flash of scarlet, and a scuffle: then wide brown eyes that looked curiously at Kin out of a dark Samoan face.

“He all-e-live stop, Père?” she asked.

The priest was fumbling with bandages and bottles. He turned to Kin.

“Do you think you can bear handling? The bandages have been on for twelve hours, and it is time that they were changed. I have fear of the fever.”

“Twelve hours,” repeated Kin vaguely.

“Rather more. But I did not like to rouse you. Be ready, my little maid. You will show the white man the softness of your fingers.”

Laleefa cast off her flower wreath and squatted beside the mats. Her child face had an innocent grave directness and beauty that Kin had seen in many other Samoan girls. She wrinkled her forehead.

“He no talk me bad talk same like-e Diego?” she demanded.

“Not so. He is English. He will suffer pain and strike not, nor curse by his gods.”

The eyes of the men met over the girl's hand, and Kin grinned unmirthfully.

“Rather rough to take a fellow on the hop that

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way, you know. All right. I won't kick. Wade in, and get it over."

Kin was not in condition for collected talk when it was over. Rustles and whispers came again to the parted mats of the opening, but Laleefa did not go out to them. A night of close wet heat rose with the mists out of the forest and up from the sea. The mosquitos "z-z-p-ped" in myriads, and down in the village a bell tinkled once and again, and lights began to show on the soft black. But the morning wind had come out of the sea before Kin dropped into uneasy sleep, and the priest snuffed out the smoking lamp.

It was not the hanging tappa mats shutting him in that held Kin's eyes when he awoke. Nor was it the priest, sitting on the camp stool, with writing things on his knee. He had come through a nightmare fearful with the crack of rifles that always went off behind him, and vaguely he looked for Dick, and for the ghastliness of the hospital. By his own right Dick should be there now. Kin wondered if Dick were living, and wondered again because he did not care. He was seeking Apia out there in the wide wash of gold that spread beyond the half-raised wall mats.

The red-hot furnace was still clawing up and down his arm and shoulder, and Kin began to get angry and then afraid. For very well he knew the Apia that pulsed to the hiss of bullets, and the wailing for the dead, and the roll of the rubbed war drums. He knew the catamarans that sailed the blue water with a silken riot of red, white and orange sails bellied out to the scented wind, and the boatmen that gleamed like little bronze statues in the prow. But across the horizon ran the sweep of a lonelier purer bay than Apia; and in place of the landing stages and the men-of-war that

rode at anchor to leeward, blotting the tumbling distances with smoke clouds, lay a shell-white shore where a brood of brown children played in a heeled-over boat. Down there on the naked sea lip should be all the careful litter and noise of English and American sailors working among the natives. Where were the crowd of loitering girls that greeted the tramp of a passing squad with shrill laughter and hand clapping, and once—when little Mallory had been in command—with kisses?

Kin raised himself on his elbow; fell back with an oath, and a whitened face.

The priest came through the room with swift noiseless steps.

“You are waking, then? And you would know the extent of your injuries? Is it not so?”

“I would know where I am,” said Kin, biting his lips. “This isn’t Apia.”

The priest’s hand closed on his crucifix.

“The British breed has the impatience and the pluck of old,” he said. “I have seen too little of it these eighteen years. Your body is bruised and torn from here”—he passed his hand over Kin’s chest—“and yet you make observation of the view!”

“It’s my trade,” explained Kin. “Also, it is of interest to me to know where I am. I reckon I have quite sufficient knowledge of my sore places.”

The priest stood beside the mats, with his hands folded in the sleeves of his soutane; and in all his lean face and figure showed the rigid self-repression of a man who has put behind him the life in which he has lived and loved as other men.

“You are far from Apia, and I do not think you will go back there soon. You have troubled the chiefest man of our village, and he is vexed. Will that content you?”

Kin spoke then in whole-hearted disgust, sat upright, and saw Laleefa crouching between him and the sun.

"Send that girl away, will you? I'm going to get up."

"Gently, my son. You are unfit——"

"Send her away, will you?"

Kin's right arm was strapped and bound, and there was pain in it beyond that of a clean bullet wound. His nerves twitched like red-hot piano wires, and his body was stiffened with bruises. But, half clothed, he got to his feet, swayed, clutched at a door post, and cried out to the priest standing immovable in the floor centre:

"What's the matter with me? A touch of fever, isn't it? Speak, can't you? By——"

The priest flung up his hand, and his face darkened.

"Curse not. Come back to your bed and be still."

"I won't." Kin began to laugh and cry in his rage. "Dash it all, man; if your flesh was being sewn up with strips from the floor-plate of Satan's own—what makes it hurt so?"

It was the cry of a frightened child, but the elder man did not move.

"May purity of soul return to him in his youth," he muttered in French. Then, in slow English: "Come thou, and rest. You will make yourself worse, my son."

"What are the piano wires doing in my head, then? Have they been broken? Are they going to hurt like this always? Tell me, can't you?"

The grey-lined face was very pitiful.

"If you will take it standing then—yes. I think they will probably hurt you more or less for many years to come. Portions of the principal neuralgic nerves are badly torn, and no skill but that of Time will heal them. Ah-h! I think you are a man."

“Haddington to Reckon With” 57

Kin stood still with one arm on the post. His face quivered with more than physical pain, and his eyes showed clear thought.

“Thanks,” he said steadily. “I guess I’ll lie down for a bit. There will be Haddington to reckon with presently, you know. I fancy he’s got the lien on me now—if he finds out.”

He stumbled forward, and fell across the mats. The priest drew a covering over him, and went out softly. Kin was assuredly a heathen, but he was none the less a man whose secret agony must be revered. The priest pulled his breviary from his pocket, and walked slowly down the sunny hill, his lips moving. But his eyes were not on the book.

A brown knot of girls were fishing on the beach as he came among them. One cast aside her line, slipped into a blue skirt, and took the track to the hilltop with the darting rush of a plover. She dropped down by the half-raised mats, crawled through and across to Kin, where he lay sobbing like a weary baby.

“You all-e-quite ’lone,” she said. “Père Eugène, him go ’way. Laleefa no go ’way. That nice?”

Laleefa’s fingers were very cool and gentle, and Kin had not been soothed by a woman many times in his life.

“Do that again,” he said. “I’ve got to put it in plain words for Haddington yet, and—and—I can’t think. Do that again, Laleefa.”

CHAPTER IV

“WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE BROUGHT YOU HERE,
SEVERNE?”

KIN lay on the flat of his back, and heard the babble of voices settle into words. Real words, and sentences with meaning to them. The world he had lived in lately had been made of chopped-up sounds that twitched at the over-strung piano wires in his head, and of faces that bobbed, staring with grave eyes. He hit at the faces when he could, and he remembered that he often told them to go away. But always they came back, and stared the more, through a mist of pain and heat and long, long twilights, until an irregular polka tune mixed everything up, and a cuttlefish with an illegitimate number of arms caught him, and held him down for three thousand years.

The three thousand years were now ended, and Kin looked unwinking across the hut that was English jerry-built grafted to Samoan science.

Two men stood against the door lintel, their profiles sharp on the fading saffron of the calm sea beyond. Kin knew them both. They were the faces that had bothered him most. The man to the right was the priest, with his straight spare lines of figure, and his bleached face like a skull's. The other wore the white linen of a planter, and his white pith helmet was pushed back from his ruffled hair. Kin knew that he had the face of a boy—until you looked into his eyes. It was his words that made the sentences: first, technical

talk of mangoes and kanakas; then names. Kin heard his own.

“What does it matter? He’s just a brute. The worst-mannered brute I ever had luck to handle. Let Diego knock some of the cussedness out of him if he wants to. I don’t care.”

“It is like you to suggest that, Grant.” The priest stiffened against the round post. “Yet you and I gave him his life. It is ours to hold.”

“I don’t think so. Unless Haddington is telling lies. Haddington can tell lies when it suits his book. But I believe it’s truth this time.”

Kin sat up, gripping at something soft that steadied and held him. He did not know that it was Laleefa’s arm.

“Haddington? Where’s Haddington? Is Haddington—here?”

It was Grant who dropped on one knee and brought his strange eyes close.

“Sane as a clock,” he said. “Will you hand me that glass, Père Eugène? Here, you—Severne—drink this up.”

Kin knocked the glass away with a little spurt of fury.

“Where’s Haddington?”

“All right. You’ll hear plenty about him later. That’s what you’re here for. What? No, he’s in Sydney. Put him down, Laleefa.”

Kin heard Père Eugène speak through the darkness that was swamping him. Grant rose with a laugh, and dusted his knees.

“Bah! Drugs won’t hurt him. He’s got the constitution of a pig. You get ’long out o’ this, Laleefa. You’ve been squatted here all day.”

“He no go die same now?” whispered the girl, clutching at Grant’s boot.

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"No. He all sereno. You'll have enough of him directly when he begins to move round. Clear, now."

Because of the cleanness of his life, Kin's flesh had healed without objection. Grant's medicines purged the fever from him, and in five days he was on his feet; savage and irritable exceedingly from weakness and pain, but fit to rule his movements and to think beyond the minute of present suffering.

He quarrelled with Grant, word for word, and felt the better for it. But Laleefa's tears brought him vague shame and puzzlement.

"Why don't you slang me back," he said. "I can't help getting cross, Laleefa."

"No can slang," she sobbed. "You no good. You no care 'bout me."

She was huddled in a brown heap on the floor, and Kin frowned, stumbling across to her. Such as this had not come within his jurisdiction before.

"What the thunder do you want me to care about you for? Don't howl like that. It makes my head ache."

"You s-say bad words. Père Eugène, him pray 'bout you. You too much unkind to me."

People were not in the habit of asking Kin to be kind to them. He did not expect it. He was kind to his work, and that was all that mattered.

"I'm sorry. But I never asked you to be kind to me. There's too much give and take in this world. Each for himself is far easier."

"I did nurse you," said Laleefa, her brown face wet through her brown hair. "Père Eugène, him nurse you."

"Then I must pay back, I suppose—when I can. Get up, little girl. I'm going to have a smoke on the hill, and you can come too."

Laleefa filled and lit his pipe for him, and Kin went into Paradise with it straightway. He had only come to it the day before, and the deep lines round mouth and jaws lessened as the comfort worked in him.

The village at the hilltop was hazy with the blue of cooking fires. On the sea beyond the coral reefs night was crawling nearer, and all the earth was full of stillness, and the smell of forest and flowers and salt breezes and faint fragrant cooking. Far down on the beach some girls were singing.

“You stay here all-e-days,” said Laleefa softly, and drew a caressing hand across the nape of his neck.

Then Grant came round the corner of the hut, laughed, and said something which sent Kin’s blood to his forehead.

“Hare,” he said sharply, and Laleefa fled without comment. She hated Grant. Grant dropped on the grass and laughed again. Always, there was suggestion in his lithe laziness of the unrulèd sinfulness of the beach. He smelt of rum and strong Jockey Club and crushed flowers. Kin, having lately lived a strait life of quinine and cooling messes, snuffed greedily, and longing ran into his eyes. He glanced down at the straggled village, gaudy among the palms, with the Chinaman’s tin saloon in dead centre.

“I suppose there’s life of some sort down there, eh? When do the trading vessels come in? I’ve seen nothing but native tubs and a little schooner handled white-man fashion.”

“That’s Farquhar’s. He’s a half-caste. There was a tramp in last week. She brought some girls from Papeete. They’ve been livening things up.”

Kin grunted. He had heard enough from Père Eugène to guess how Grant got his Jockey Club.

“I’ll get Farquhar to punt me round to Apia in a couple of days,” he said.

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“Will you?” Grant lit a cigarette very deliberately. “What do you suppose brought you here, Severne?”

“Accident,” said Kin briefly.

“Ah!” Grant turned suddenly, and met the other’s eyes full. “What do you know of Haddington, Severne?”

“Haddington has a cocoanut plantation on the east side of Upolu. A man called Grant is his manager. Louis Diego is overseer.”

“That all?”

“To you, yes.”

Kin’s face was unshaven and haggard; his eyes were dulled with pain, and the spread of his limbs showed weakness. But there was strength in him somewhere. Grant recognised it.

“All right. I don’t like to be pumped myself. See here, Severne. Haddington didn’t want you to come here. Perhaps you guessed that? Well, he sent us a description of you, so that we could avoid you. Diego recognised you by it over on Vailete. And as, for private reasons, we happened to want you, he took you. D’you see?”

“Ah! Did he do—this?” Kin’s unwasted hand ran down the bandaged arm, and Grant backed from the ring in his voice.

“Eh? No. He marked you down and set a native on to you. He had rather a bother getting you away, and then you tried to screw his leg off. He isn’t loving you just now for that.”

The piano strings were beginning their crazy polka tune again. Kin kept hand on himself savagely.

“What did you want me for?”

Grant blew a ring of smoke, and sent another through it.

“Diego will tell you that—to-morrow or next day. He’s down the coast. Had a row with his native wife,

and she cleared. Diego went drunk mad for a week. Then he went after her. He won't get her, though. That doesn't matter. There are plenty more.”

Kin marvelled how that face came to be a boy's unlined one still. A roar of laughter blew up through the still air, and four men rolled out under the dripping bougainvillea about the Chinaman's saloon. They reeled into the trees, their arms round the necks of each, and the old devil woke in Kin.

“I've talked to Père Eugène and Laleefa since the beginning of things,” he said irrelevantly. “It's left a soft sweet taste in my mouth.”

Grant's eyes understood. But he had wallowed in the flesh pots all his life.

“Père Eugène isn't soft and sweet, though he's cutting the heart out of himself trying to clean this place. He won't do it. Backwashes are always dirty. But it's all in the day's work. What you do doesn't matter so long as you get through to the end somehow.” He rose up. “I'm off. Got Diego's work on my back now, and a five-mile ride before me.” His canvas-shod foot brushed the grass by Kin's cheek, and halted. “Don't fight Diego, if you can help it. He'll get what he wants, anyhow. Pain pretty bad, eh?”

Kin was shaking with it. But he was also beginning to recognise Grant's share in this business.

“No,” he said surlily. “I'll be all right when I get to Apia. Got my writing to do there.”

“I know you have. But you're a better man than I take you for if you can do it. Well—I'll send up Laleefa if I run across her. So-long.”

In the day before Kin had insisted on dictating some stuff to Père Eugène. And on the re-reading he broke loose into such hysterical despair as brought him stern reproof and pitying comfort. For Père

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Eugène knew that to put a strong sword into a man's hand and to take it away again when he goes into the battle is cruelty beyond death; but for the man to cry out in cowardice is the utmost sin. Kin did not cry out more than once. He let his brain lie still, than which there is no harder thing; and, because he had never played with his constitution, the butchered nerves built up slowly, giving rare hours of blessed ease. Diego did not come back that week-end. But Laleefa brought up some friends one night, and Père Eugène sat with Kin, and made no objection when they played an accordion under the palms, and sang himenes to rollicking sea-tramp airs.

"It is pure enjoyment," he said; "and the earth holds little enough of it, God knows."

And Kin agreed humbly, not grinning at all when a Papeete girl came behind him in the dusk and toyed with his hair. Laleefa's black head showed among the red-dyed ones of Samoan fashion as the girls swayed and sang. Kin remembered that Laleefa was a stray, even as himself. "She comes from the Devil knows where," Grant told him; "and she's bound for the same place. But she's straight. All along the beach they'll tell you that. Père Eugène wouldn't have her kicking round his diggings if she wasn't."

Bats stirred the big leaves into murmuring whispers; languorous scents came out of the earth and the air; the himenes gave way to strange trembling native songs. Kin lay on his stomach and watched, with the critical look that was his nature gone out of his eyes. The poison of the Islands was beginning to work.

He knew this in the next day, and was angry. In the evening cool he stumbled for the first time down the hill, and went into the Chinaman's saloon. Refuse from half the Pacific washed into that beach as into others. Kin meant to find some that would wash out

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with him. Ah See was florid and oily of tongue, until Kin spoke of sea traffic. Then he hedged, and referred him to Farquhar. Kin found Farquhar, drinking in a back room with three beachcombers and a Methodist minister in need of repair. He was a dirty round-barrelled half-caste, and he utterly refused to hire, sail, or sell his cutter at Kin's desire. The minister explained genially that Diego would shoot any man who gave Kin a boat, and Kin, in black rage, went back to the reeking saloon and got royally drunk.

He did not drink generally, because it spoiled his work, and he did not sin in many of the small and ordinary ways for the same reason. But when Père Eugène came next day as a man of wrath and called him names under the big bread-fruit tree commanding the beach, Kin was amazed.

“I apologise for making a beast of myself,” he said. “I must have done that by the head I've got. But all the same, I'm better than most men in that way. I keep straight for sake of——” He stopped abruptly, jerked up a root of sleepy poppies, and cast them from him. He was remembering that there might no longer be need to keep straight for his work's sake.

“For sake of love, you would say? That is the word of a young man. Eternally for love's sake he vows this and that. Love fails, and so has he digged a pit into which his own feet shall bring him.”

Kin squinted sideways under drooped lids. He knew by the tone that the mask was off for the moment, and he read as he listed in the thin tortured face. He had no right to look, neither had he any compunction. All men's heart blood was his when he wanted to fill his inkpot. Dick told him so once, and Kin acknowledged it unabashed.

“I am bigger than they,” he said. “They can only

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feel their own little tin troubles. I can make others feel them."

Then had Dick moralised of boasters and scorners the while Kin picked up the bone they had quarrelled over, and carried it home to chew. Very softly he dropped out his answer. The smell of bread fruit cooking came up from the clearing below, and its polyglot smell made his heart sick with memory of a washing day under the wattles round Castle Rock.

"Yes; for my love's sake. And my love is a bit of paper and the stub end of a pencil, and—what I can make out of 'em. And it's this that I'm in danger of losing, you tell me. If I think, I may lose my power to think. Good Heavens! And I've only got drunk once since I knew it!"

"And if you do lose it?"

"If? Oh, well," said Kin carelessly, "the easiest and nicest way would be to put a bullet through my head. But I think I should probably come back here, and play on Haddington's plantation or in Ah See's rooms with the hoola girls, and the Methodist, and the rest of 'em. I might last out a couple of years at that."

He blinked up at Père Eugène, standing, a black blot on the winnowed gold that the branches let through. The pinched mouth was more tender with pity than Kin had ever seen it.

"My son, are you no more of a man than that?"

"A man is his work," said Kin hastily. "If that is done, he is done too."

"Not so. A man's work is as eternal as his soul. I have seen some who have lost both—in New Caledonia. They are past all—the good and the evil, and the hope of redemption. It is peace, perhaps. But the road to it is rough, and the price heavy—too heavy."

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“Work is not eternal. It may chuck you over. You tell me mine may.”

“The good God gives a man more than one tooth wherewith to bite,” said Père Eugène gravely.

Kin grunted, digging his fingers among the grass roots.

“I’ve bitten on many. They all ached but this. And if your God pulls this out, I tell you I’ll go on sops to the end of my days. Why shouldn’t I?”

“I said that once—of something other than work. But I have expiated it—up and down these Islands—through seventeen years.”

He crossed himself, muttering a few words in French; and Kin tucked this new thought away in a brain corner and went back to a dinner of bananas and breadfruit. At the end of it he said:

“Expiation’s a played-out game. You pay what you signed on for, and there’s no sense in adding more than the usual interest. Where’s my pipe, Laleefa?”

“Diego, him back,” remarked Laleefa, handing it over.

“What? How d’you know?”

“See him, He bad man. Use smash words. He no get Mau. She some fine sense, that girl.”

“Shouldn’t wonder. I must hunt Mr. Diego up tomorrow. Where does he hang out in the village, Laleefa?”

Laleefa explained with some detail, and Kin went out to consider things. He knew long since that Diego was Spanish-American by birth, and brute by nature. He knew that he ruled the beach by a mixture of cunning and hard cash, and that he did more trading than Haddington would have liked. Now there was to find why Diego kept him here. Kin’s brain was yet giddy when he tried to think, and much walking

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made his legs wobble. In a banana patch clear away to right of the village he dropped in deep shade with great fan leaves shutting him in, and dozed to the sleepy whirr of insects and the slow roll of the sea. Somewhere back in the shadows sounded the familiar blow of the banana knife, and twice the drowsy high thrill of a bird. The German overseer rumbled out last directions to the banana cutters. Kin heard him crash through the liano undergrowth in direction of the beach, stop and speak. Then came Grant's voice, with its low far-carrying tones.

"Don't know? My friend, if my brother was the Apia agent, I bet I'd know. And you're as fly as me any day. What? That's stale. Don't I know Pardey messed up that first contract on Vailete, you ass? Haddington writes that he's shipped off the second draft per agreement. Who's in charge, and where is he going to land it?"

Kin sat up in the undergrowth, and the lust of the tracker was in his eyes. "Vould you hush?" said the German angrily. "I am nod supposed to know nodings. De schooner vas shtill at Tupare mit Pardey dam sick—"

"Confound you! Tell me something I want to know, can't you? Where's the second cargo?"

"It vas nod vise dat von should hear—I am nod supposed to know nodings—it vas Van Groot's poat, und dey did near catch him. He vas nod quick mit his heels, und he did haf to put der lot into der sea. Oh yes; I did shwear, too. But vhat is der use?"

Grant was not saying anything that would bear repeating; and the heavy German rode into the speech presently.

"Id does nod matter. Haddington was gcontract for so many shtores, so mooch ammunition; und mine broder vill see dat it gomes. Dat is all."

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“Is it? And where does our profit come in? Haddington will bleed us to pay for it!”

“Dere is de gourd from Vailete to suck yet.”

Grant laughed.

“That’s for to-morrow. It will take some husking. Well, so-long.”

He swung through the trees to the left, and so on to the village. Kin sat still, his nails clinched in his palms. He was trying to calculate in how much he was in debt to the British Empire for that he had allowed such as Haddington to feed and clothe him.

CHAPTER V

A ONE-SIDED EPISODE

GRANT came for Kin in the morning, and Kin took the track down the wide grass street with eagerness. There was nothing in all the world more near his heart than the meeting of Diego face to face.

Diego's town house stood where two streets crossed, and in an hour the corner was blocked by giggling girls and loafing young Kanakas from the beach. A Chinaman passing with his double-ended burden of fish stopped to ask questions. A girl answered, waving her lighted cigarette explanatorily.

"In there. The big black Englishman. He fight Grant and Diego. Call names."

"All litee," said the Chinaman, moving on. "Diego call back. He a-plenty more."

And then Kin came out, shouldering through the crowd in a blind strength that made the girls scuttle back, squealing. Kin's shirt was torn at the throat, his knuckles were bleeding, and a knob on his left temple was beginning to bulge over the eye. Grant called blandly from the doorway:

"Get Laleefa to put on plantain leaves, Severne. I'll come up and see you to-night."

Kin swung on, unspeaking. Stiffly he mounted the hill in the hot sunshine, and in the door stumbled on Père Eugène with his basket of medicines. Laleefa and two girls more were playing cards in the hut shadow. Kin chased them away in open wrath, and wheeled on the priest.

"Did you know what they wanted? Did you think I was that sort? By —, father, if you did——"

"Stop!" said Père Eugène, and the word cut like a whip lash; "you will speak to me with clean lips."

Kin put his hand to his forehead. He was shaking with pain and fury.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Did you know what they wanted? They wanted me to go back to Haddington and fleece him for them. For them. But they would pay me well for it. That's what they asked me to do."

"And you told them—what?"

"I told them to go to Hell," said Kin frankly. He looked at his knuckles. "And I think I tried to put them there."

Père Eugène dropped his eyes. He knew that they showed the lawless approval of the unregenerate.

"You yourself are not scatheless. That forehead needs embrocation," he said.

"That's nothing." Kin straightened himself wearily, and the priest saw the pain lines deepen in the lean face. "I must get away from here. At once. They'll stop me if they can, the scabs. They daren't let me go back to Haddington now. Fools they are to show their hands clean out. Any ass knows better than that!"

He stopped, turning white about the lips. The priest looked at him critically.

"You are a very obstinate man," he said; "but I think you have done more than you can this time. That arm is not yet half healed——"

Kin staggered into the hut, holding his head between his hands.

"Give me some of your sleepy medicine," he said. "I'll think later. I must think, you know, for I've got to get back to my work while I'm sane."

Kin slept for five unbroken hours. Then Père Eugène toiled up the hill with his empty basket, and the grey dust on his stooped shoulders. He had met Grant on the beach, and Grant, who handled life and death with alike cheerfulness, had given him plain warning, and news that frightened him.

The hut was dusky and still, but Kin lay out in the sunshine, smoking. He had the Australian salamander love of heat. He turned drowsily as the priest paused, and his eyes were calmer.

"Seen either of my beloved friends?" he asked.

"Has Laleefa ever told you that she loves you?" demanded the priest without circumlocution. Kin opened his eyes.

"Crumbs, yes. Heaps of times. Every Island girl tells that to every chap she sees, doesn't she? It's only a form."

"And what have you said to her? Stand up, man, and answer me."

"What the deuce d'you mean?" said Kin, coming to his feet promptly.

"Grant tells me that the whole beach talks of Laleefa's love for you. He tells me that men laugh behind my back, calling me blind. He tells me that you have abused my trust——"

Kin's hands had shut like clamped steel, but his voice was even and low.

"Seems to me Grant has told you a good deal. Did you believe him?"

"Not if you tell me that he lies," said Père Eugène unhesitatingly.

"Thanks," said Kin thickly. "To the best of my knowledge there isn't as much truth in the whole thing as you could put between a pair of shut shear blades." He held out his hands. "Will you shake on that, father. There are enough chaps about seem

to think I'm all kinds of a skunk. I'd rather you weren't one of them."

The starved hands that were so like the claws of a bird came over Kin's.

Père Eugène had earned the right to read a man's soul, and he saw just the best medicine for one who has had his honour assessed at something under two-twenty pounds net and a small percentage on a year's copra.

"Belief is nothing without proof. See, I will show you if I believe in you. Diego would keep you here until you rot. He has control of the sea coast, and he knows that no native would go with you into the forest. When the night birds cry in the vaults of big trees they say that it is devils. But there is one—not a native—who will go with you through the forest."

"You, father?"

"No; my work lies here. It is Laleefa."

"Laleefa!" Kin stared blankly. "Laleefa!"

"She is forest bred, and from Apia she can return to Tahiti. She has relations in Huahine. And she does not throw her affections from one to another as a Papeete girl throws flowers. She will love none but you." His eyes smiled. "And I trust you," he added softly.

Kin watched the other sternly, his brows drawn together.

"What d'you think they'll say of you here if you do this?"

"I have thought. I may lose some little power. But I can regain it—if God wills."

Kin drew a long breath. He saw keenly into the fulness of this thing, and his heart was very humble.

"When I gain a thing I stick to it," he said briefly. "You're a better man than I am, father. Perhaps—it isn't always—each fellow for himself only—"

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It was the very beginning of the lesson, and Père Eugène smiled again.

“Not always. And you will go——”

“To-night,” said Kin, the unrest waking in his eyes. “Can I go to-night?”

“Yes; it is better to go to-night. I will find Laleefa.”

He went out with his head bent. The width of the live earth was not for him any more.

It was a half hour later when Laleefa came, panting and shining eyed; her arms full of fresh cocoanuts, and eager words on her tongue.

“This all same good 'nuff,” she cried; and dropped the things that rolled all ways, and flung herself down at Kin's elbow. “You go in forest, me go too. You go to Apia; me go too. That so, my chief?”

Her buoyant brightness touched Kin somewhere. He came back from thoughts of what he would say to one Haddington in a little while, and looked at her over his pipe. She leant forward to him on one arm, the whole of her vivid with love and delight; and the scent of flowers in her hair was more potent than the tobacco.

“You're not scared of the devils?” he asked.

“Diego, him one devil—Grant too. Other devils only cry. They no class. No can hurt.”

“Shouldn't wonder if you're right. If we go to-night”—Kin's eyes were drawn again to the clouded greens rising behind the hut to the sky line—“how long d'you think it will take us to get to Apia, Laleefa?”

“You no sick, 'bout five days, Père Eugène say. You sick”—she spread her hands with the palms wide—“me not know. That your business.”

“Oh, well; I'm not going to be sick. I'm just as keen to get to Apia as you are.”

Laleefa picked up one of the cocoanuts and began to husk it.

"Me no keen," she said, very low. *

"You're not, eh? Why?"

"You go 'way from me at Apia. I go Tahiti. I say 'Talofa alii'; you say 'Good-a-bye!'" She looked at him sideways through her tumbled hair, and her words came like a caress. "That all, my chief? That all?"

"Yes," said Kin, wise in foreknowledge; "that's all." He got up. "I haven't got any packing to do, Laleefa; but I'm going to nose round for a weapon of some sort, even if it's only one of Ah See's table knives."

At the head of the steep street he met a Kanaka with a string of scarlet berries, and straightway swapped his remaining sleeve link for a sheath knife. But Père Eugène went one better when he strolled with Kin that evening up the stony watercourse behind the village.

"All I could find," he explained. "I was afraid to ask openly for guns. I am afraid it is not of much use."

It was an old horse pistol, with powder horn and packet of slugs attached, and unless looks lied it promised to kick like a Spanish mule at the shooting. But Kin took it gratefully, and then the two stood still. Away down to the left the creek had ripped out a side-track with a hut like a periwinkle on stilts at the bottom. The priest turned aside.

"I shall stay there through the night," he said. "A man is ill. Death before the day dawns. I can help him through with it. Your way lies round the skirt of the forest, and north to the cemetery. There Laleefa will be waiting. Good-bye, my son."

Kin put his arm over the bowed shoulders in a sudden rough caress. "Good-bye, dear old chap," he said.

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The face so close to his own was rigid with self-repression.

"I shall miss you, and I shall miss Laleefa. And you will be careful? Remember that you take from Samoa more than you brought to it."

"I'm not likely to forget—or—to forget——" Kin stammered over unaccustomed words. "If I could thank you for—more than you know, I'd be feeling it less—so-long."

He dived into the bush, and looked back not at all. The priest stood until the black night of tree-line yielded up only silence. Then he climbed down the stony way to the man who yet had need of him.

Kin tracked Laleefa's red kilt among the moss and whiteness of the cemetery, and they struck together into the forest, forgetful that he had not walked three miles in as many weeks.

Together they ran down long grassy aisles that had assuredly belonged to cathedrals when the world was young. Together they swung up rough ladders of rock, and dropped, hand by hand, down liano ropes to shadowy gullies heavy with all sweet scents. And before the red was gone from the rifts of sky miles above, and full moon swam up out of the hidden sea and dredged the forest with spikes of vivid white, Laleefa began to draw close to the man, her fingers fiddling nervously with the strap of her food bag.

Kin was growing deadly weary, and his strained senses were sharply awake to the life of the forest that breathed round them: in the leaves that held themselves still until his passing left them to their whispers again; in the vague noises that were children crying and men cutting bananas and the creak of oars in the rowlocks, and yet that were none of these things.

In a tangle of liano and wild lime he dropped limply.

"Just five minutes loaf, Laleefa," he said; and fell asleep with her name half said.

Laleefa pulled his head on her knees, and sat still in the dusk. Her oval face and her long soft eyes were full of supreme content. She had no care for the night, or for anything in this great mysterious world of shadows but the dark head on the red of her kilt. She touched the hair softly.

"You all for me now," she murmured, and suddenly flung up her head exactly as a doe does when danger threatens her young. Listening fear ran into her eyes.

"Grant, you devil," she said, very levelly and slowly. Then she roused Kin.

He was broad awake in a breath.

"After us, are they—by Jove! They're cleverer than I thought. Which way?"

"I know. I been so far one 'nother time."

Kin plunged after her into fastness of tree fern and wild bananas; breathless; beating away the branches that slapped back at him; listening wide eared for the sounds that began to shape in the distance. He stumbled into something that stung like a hive upset, and Laleefa, hearing him swear, stood still.

"This all-e-right. Kapai. Tui-tui bite like fun. Hurt them red hot. We stay here, my chief."

"Thanks," Kin sought in frank haste for a tree; "but I don't think much of sand shoes for this stuff. Bull-ants are a fairy to it. Up you go, Laleefa. Lie flat along that branch. What? No; I'm not going to be nabbed. Don't you believe it."

The bush behind gave up wild crackling and rush of talk. Kin cast himself behind a creeper-tufted log, and the prickles of the tui-tui flattened against his cheek as he considered the joy of being knifed like a pig if Diego should find him. The torrent washed

with the roar of a big wave into the tui-tui; stopped, shuffled, and backed cursing as the poisonous scrub lashed out.

"Shut up, you louts. Hang your pricks. I can't hear——"

"That's Grant," murmured Kin. "My man, you'd fight fairer than Diego."

Half the flotsam of the beach was there. Kin knew by the talk that belongs principally to beach-combers. Grant drew a match up his trouser leg.

"They went this way right enough. Just now, too. The sensitive is all curled up."

"From where you go stand it curl up," suggested a native.

"How far?"

"I not can tell. A—distance."

Kin giggled, hearing Grant's reply, and rejoiced as the men swore at the slapping nettle-fingers. He quite forgot that Laleefa had come through it bare-legged and without complaint.

A low wind sighed suddenly in the trees, and from nowhere in particular came the sound of knuckles knocking on a door. The natives bunched promptly, chattering of devils. Kin heard Diego speak out of the dark, and his hands twitched. But he lay still, remembering the woman depending on him, and selfishly irritated at the knowledge that for once he could not do as he liked. A rollicking laugh rang from the far-above tree tops, and a night bird answered from the earth. Kin did not hear what the men said. It was not regular conversation. Then panic swung their feet homeward, and he heard Grant go out on the tide, swearing, and struggling to turn it.

"Grant again. Diego's heading the list, most like. He's been too long in the Islands for night work. Come out of that, Laleefa."

He pulled her out of the tree, and her tears wetted his neck as she slid close to him. He shook free hurriedly.

"What's that for? Don't be a little fool, Laleefa. They're gone."

"I 'nuff 'fraid," she sobbed. "S'pose Diego one shoot you, me no live. Me die. Me love 'nuff."

Kin carried her out of the sensitive in silence. Then he grinned.

"You Island ladies ain't shy," he said. "I guess I won't let Dick play with you when we get to Apia, Laleefa."

For three days they trekked to the northwest, until Kin began to feel of the importance of a beetle in a field of headed grain. The murky, huge-limbed forest was everywhere about them, and wide silence was threaded on the notes of birds they never saw. Laleefa steered by the moss on the sheltered tree sides, or by the trend of the branches, or by a thousand things more. She climbed the cocoa trees for nuts, and showed Kin how to break them, and she knew at which age the wild sugar-cane tasted sweetest, and what the best flavoured bananas looked like.

Kin was enjoying the days amazingly. The grand brooding calm of the forest touched the very nerve of his trouble and stilled it. There was no pain in the long, drowsy-scented hours when orchids made faces at them, and wild lime spread snares for their feet, and flower and fern were everywhere.

On the third evening Kin shot a wild pig on the scrap of a bluff. The kick of the pistol nearly dislocated his shoulder, and the pig was a war-worn old boar with a six-inch hide. But Kin was mightily pleased with himself, and, incidentally, with Laleefa.

"Smells good, doesn't it?" he said, sizzling a slice over the dry-wood fire. "Laleefa, I'm sick of fruit and milk. I want meat again, and——"

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"Men," said Laleefa.

"By Jove! Yes, I do. How did you know, though?"

"Jes' see. You walk and walk all-e-day. You no answer me talk some time. You want home. You want 'nother thing." She leaned forward, her hands shut, and her long eyes lit. "Me no give it you," she said.

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Kin.

"Jes' this. You my chief I love. I keep you here. You no can get out 'nless me show." She waved her hand to the tree boles majestic in the dusk. "Me no show," she said.

Kin laid aside his meat and stood up.

"Then I go alone," he said, and plunged blindly into the undergrowth. But here pure bluff gave way to fear before Laleefa's arms came over his shoulders, and her broken words sobbed in his ears.

Kin turned and caught her by the wrists. He had no pity for her love, because he did not understand it. He had no pity for her womanhood, because he did not understand love. If this crying, pleading thing had been a man he would have known exactly what to do. But he drove a merciless bargain with her there in the tangles where light from the bush fire washed red.

Laleefa was somewhere down at his feet, clasping him by the knees, and praying by all the gods of the Island. Many of them were new to Kin.

"I no care. I no care. Beat me. Do all-e-like Diego do Mau. I no care. Jes' keep me. I love—see, I love—no talk me that voice—my chief——"

Kin had seen men and a few women when the primal joys or sorrows had torn reserve from them. And then he had stood by to dissect tones and movements. But Laleefa had struck the personal note for

the first time in his life, and it shook him. Yet there was to him no beauty in the childish abandonment of all for love.

"Let go," he said. "Don't be such a little idiot, Laleefa. You don't know what you're saying——"

"Ioe. Me know. Too much me know. Me take you Apia, then, but no go Huahine. Me stay—no can leave you, alii. Oh, ta Ra; my heart. I would stay——"

Kin stooped and loosed her hands.

"Get up," he said. "I daresay you would stay, but—I—don't—want—you—to. You take me Apia, I pay your passage, Huahine. That fair, Laleefa! Stop it. The girls on the beach would laugh to see you now."

She stood up then, and flung out her hands.

"That all," she said, with a sudden dignity. "I sorry, my chief. Those girls no class. I no class now, I think."

She walked back to the far side of the fire, rolled herself in her pareo, and lay down under the shadows. Kin went back to his pig's flesh; but it tasted harsh on the teeth. He slung it aside, and sat with knees drawn up, staring into the fire, and smoking pipe after pipe. The noises of the forest waked round him, and under her shawl Laleefa lay with blank dark eyes on the dark. And to Kin for the first time came a glimpse of the purity and the undying beauty of a Love that is beyond the issues of the day; that is beyond human tabulation; that is Divine.

They tramped through the next day with a nervous reserve between them, and at evening came among the thick rotting vegetation that battens on the haunch of Vaea Mountain where it sits up behind Apia. The ground shivered with phosphorescence as it had done on the night of that fight by the shore, and Laleefa

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followed her chief through it in dumb patience, for hopelessness had eaten all fear from her heart.

There was a crackle in the undergrowth where a patch of bananas showed every leaf in the ghostly glare. Kin's heart came to his throat in a sob, and he shifted the knife in his moist hand. A boar burst through the thicket, crossing the gleaming ground phantom-wise, with a troop of phantom piglings behind him. They made no shadow, and a light that cannot throw a shadow is a horrible thing to look at. Kin went on, with the strained face ever behind his shoulder, and the unearthliness of the place creeping round him.

The wind soughed among the tree trunks, bringing a smell that was entirely human. Kin had smelt it before in the trenches of Mataafa's men. He took two steps, and an irregular line of red twinkled on the earth ahead. Then he dropped flat, hugging himself joyfully.

"There's fun on somewhere," he said to the breathing behind his shoulder. "An attack from Apia, most like. Wonder just where we are. You stop 'long here, Laleefa. I go find out."

He wriggled forward, snake-wise, as he had seen black trackers do in a gum scrub, and his clothes were ribbons before the trees gaped to a clearing swamped in white light, and a long low house, wide-verandahed. Kin had seen that house in pictures.

"Vailima," he said in his throat, and forgot Laleefa, and forgot everything but his desire to get inside and to touch the things that Stevenson had touched.

He crawled past the open jaws of the track that leads down to Apia, and that is, in the vernacular, "The road of a thousand grateful hearts." Some of the grateful hearts were entrenched before it, hatching

plans for the extermination of the Englishman. Kin heard them as he slid by with a chuckle.

No sentry guarded the long verandahs, nor the shell of what had once been a great man's home. A lizard lifted its head and disappeared in an eye-blink as Kin set foot on the boards, knowing that it was sacrilege and profanity and all manner of things to walk boldly into a man's house when the man himself lay on the hill above, shut down by a slab of rock.

Kin bared his head as he stooped through the low door, walking softly. But the boards awoke from their spell and spoke, and an answering sound came from the room beyond. Someone was working stealthily and quickly with wood, and things that clinked. Kin made himself small against the door, and peered through the crack of the hinge.

A man knelt on the floor where the moonlight was livid through the unshut red window, and two curled fuses lay beside him. He was fitting a third into the neck of a glass bottle, and the poise of his body was not strange to Kin.

"Grant it is, sure enough. Well, I'll be particularly hanged. Now, this means——" He straightened himself, drew a quick breath, and saw it all in a flash. "Expecting our men, of course. Well; I'm in luck. But I wish I had a tomahawk of some kind."

He flung back the door, and Grant half rose as Kin closed with him in a sudden leap. They came to the ground together, and neither spoke nor hesitated. Grant was struggling to get at his hip pocket, but Kin was strong in the new life that rushed through his weakened sinews. He got his man under him, and held him down, although in the stress of the desperate grip breath came only in gasps, and the world swam. Grant's neck veins were swelling, and Kin pressed

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harder when the still night was whipped on the instant into a storm of shouts and bullet hail. The grasp of the two on the floor slacked simultaneously, and Kin knew that someone was executing a rear attack without him.

“An’ giving ’em gyp, too! Ah-h-h! Would you——” but Grant turned eelwise, broke away with a lithe twist, and fled through the door. Kin leapt after, with his brain whirling.

“Hetton’s yell, by Jove! Hi! A Malietoan! A Malietoan!”

He sprang down the steps; and his eyes were eager, and his hands gripping for a weapon that was not there.

“My chief! Oh-h, my chief!”

Kin heard, unheeding; for the rattle of bullets and the swift half-seen rushes of dark bodies across the shadowed garden were vivid to him above all else. The animal fierceness in him was not easily exorcised by a girl’s cry.

“My chief—come—ah-h—come.” Then he wheeled aside, and crushed among the great poinsettia leaves to find her.

“I come. Where are you, Laleefa? Not hit, eh? Ah, by Jove—here; let me get you out of this.”

He propped her against the wooden steps that climbed to the verandah; but under the strong silver light her head fell forward, and she fought weakly with her coming death.

Kin twisted, his arms still round her, and shouted into the noisy dark that was full of hurrying shadows. But to Laleefa there was none other in the world but they two down in the warm scents of the broken flowers.

“All no good—but love,” she faltered. “You love one day—you know true. Kiss me, my chief—I go far-off—kiss me——”

Kin’s desires had not led him to kiss women in his

life. He had not dabbled in the side of Life which is like to reach out until it touches and understands the springs of all things. In so far he was dumb and brute stupid, and he felt it vaguely before the face that was dark with love and bitter pain.

"I no go Huahine now—this better—kiss me."

Kin did it awkwardly, and Dick, crossing the lawn at the double, saw the picture struck out for his benefit in a glare of moonlight.

The man who stooped over the woman raised his head, and Dick grabbed him in unbelieving astonishment.

"Kin! Great Scott! Kin! Old man; we thought

"She's dead, isn't she? Look, Dick. I never saw a girl die before."

But a man with a sword that clinked, and a red badge on his shoulder strap, pushed Dick away, and knelt down. He was a surgeon from one of the men-of-war in the harbour below.

"Dead," he said, the next minute; "yes; dead. Poor thing. Well—we can't do anything here, and we're wanted ahead. Bresser's going to have his work cut out to clear the trenches."

"Take my Colt. I've got a rifle too."

Dick forced the little deadly thing into Kin's hand, where its touch woke up the fighting madness that smothers all else. Kin turned from that which lay in shade of the red poinsettias and ran with the others, slipping Dick's bullet pouch inside his ragged shirt.

And as he ran some long-said words of Haddington's tickled his brain. "The epicure is the only man who does not know that everything is an incident—and soon forgotten."

CHAPTER VI

THE INFLUENCE OF PÈRE EUGÈNE

"WELL, he's your mate, isn't he?"

"Blest if I know. Never thought about it."

"You brought him along, anyhow"—Hetton knotted his boot lace, and came to his feet with a stamp—"and it's about up to you to take him away again, I reckon. Apia's getting a bit much for him."

Kin was on the locker, smoking crossly.

"I tell you, I'm not going back to Sydney yet. There's more fun here. Let Dick look after himself."

"Oh, quite so. But it's the beachcombers and water carriers who are looking after your Dick, and they're not doing him any good. He's soft—soft as putty. 'Tisn't my picnic, though. Do as you like."

Hetton went out, and Kin frowned through the porthole at the clipped picture of the *Tauranga* rolling to the swell. He had seen clearly enough what nine weeks of unqualified laziness and tropical license had done for Dick. It needs a strong man to live among folk who habitually take all the clothes off their sentiments. And Dick was not a strong man.

". . . But I've no call to be his whipper-in, all the same." Kin turned his back on the *Tauranga*, and came to a halt in the cabin centre. "I've got myself to think of. That comes first, an' Père Eugène may say what he likes. Starkey swears that my nerves want buildin' up. I ain't going back to Sydney till I can stand up to Haddington; an' Dick may go

hang. So that settles the whole box o' tricks." He opened the door with a jerk. "Père Eugène's an old fool," he told it, and went on deck.

The quick tramp of men passed him to the steam launch, where the blunt-headed Nordenfeldt sat in the bow; and Kin tumbled in to lie on the half-deck for two perfect hours of blue sky and blue water that parted for the sudden flashing smile of white coral reefs as the cutter dipped and rose to the crests. Hetton's clothes were ragged, and he had not shaved since Kin came down with the storming party from Vailima three weeks ago; but Kin, looking at him sidelong across the white boards, felt a swift irritated inferiority.

"I'll do what I jolly well like, and Hetton can mind his own business," he said under breath, and pulled out his pocket-book.

He had seven pocket-books crammed with notes, and scrappy legends, and vivid little bits of truth, and a few blatant lies for the benefit of interviewers. The cunning came back to his hand as his body strengthened; and conceit and content came with it. And he drank full of the good days when the cutter ploughed nose under at tail of a chase, or swung to the slow anchor where shallow water showed bottom of all slimy beautiful things that crept and made strange pictures below, whilst Hetton or Slade sweated behind him in the hot sunshine, flinging commands at the men getting out the boats. There were good days too on the bare sandy foreshores, where the Gatling bucked and clattered in a slipshod hurry, and Page and Ollivier got their men into a copra shed and fought for seven solid hours, until the *Lark* brought up her guns to cover their retreat. There were mornings when Bresser raged helplessly because Hetton had taken the best part of his army into forests infested with natives, and would not retire it. There were nights of calm moonlight across wide

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sea and sky, when the shadows were soft purple on silver, and the scent of flowers was heavily sweet under the palms and in the wreaths of the Samoan girls, where they swayed and sang and used talk that was broken through with little gusts of laughter.

Kin knew all this and more; and he did not want to leave it, even that he might clear matters with Haddington, and still less that he might save Dick from foreseen trouble. He climbed out sullenly when the cutter grounded and Hetton swept his men into fathom-high forest, with the *Tauranga* closing inshore behind them, showing a red flag at her main.

A shell screeched overhead, and Kin drew level with Hetton.

“What are you playing at here?”

“Native village. Cram full. You’d best bunk if you don’t like it. Bound to be hot.”

Kin laughed.

“I don’t think it. Was round here in a rowboat yesterday, and the whole place was empty. Hi, Wilton; you’d better go an’ semaphore the *Tauranga*, if that’s what you’re after. She won’t draw much out of those streets.”

“You knew that was what we were after,” said Hetton in wrath. “What did you let us come on a tom-fool game for, confound you?”

“Never was asked for my opinion,” said Kin, with a yawn. “By Jove! Good shooting. Lake is on to the sights of her, I’ll go bail.”

“You may go where you like for me,” said Hetton; and Kin laughed again.

“You interfered in my business this morning, an’ I let yours alone. We’re quits now. I say, stand aside. Here’s a burying party.”

There was a great hush in the shady late-cut track, where slender saplings and mighty trees dripped with

glories of scented flowers; and over a broken bridge spanning a dark little stream a party from Tuliangi came in sight, bearing a dead man from his last fight.

The body was slung on a pole, and the gay mats that wrapped it made a note of arrogant colour along the dim greens of the track. A woman tagged behind the quick even feet of the bearers. Her grey straggled hair and dried skin told her off as one of an earlier generation, and Hetton frowned in pity.

"Her only son, perhaps. They went up with Slade after the morning gun; all cock-a-hoop, too. Poor beggar. Who was the chap made some rhymes about 'Woe to the earth where men give death and women give birth?'"

"Don't know. What's wrong with his ending, anyway? It's better than we are likely to get."

"Wasn't thinking of him. But I don't know, though. I b'lieve if your Dick had a mother it'd hurt her more to follow him along the track he's going than along the way that chap's taking."

"D—— it all," said Kin in white heat. "Go an' moralise to Dick, can't you, and let me alone."

Hetton tightened his sword strap.

"Fall in! March!" he said briefly; and the white men followed on in measured silence, as the glancing skins and clinking steel and bright lavalavas passed with the old bent woman up to the village, taking the dead man home.

It was evening before they returned to Apia, and stumbled against Dick on the Tivoli. Dick was not by himself, and Kin, seeing Hetton's face, reddened angrily. Then he carried Dick off to the International Hotel, sat him in a big chair, and talked to him.

Dick hunched his shoulders, and denied all accusations stolidly.

"They're good enough for me," he said. "No

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frills an' fooleries about 'em. You shut up, Kin. You're not too nasty particular yourself."

"I can stand it. You can't."

"I can stand all you can, confound you. Who gave you the right to meddle with me?"

Kin stood up, shaking himself as a dog may; and he looked at the flabby red-faced bulk in the cane chair. Hetton's words had bitten deeper than he knew.

"My strength gives me the right," he said slowly. "You get rattled over things that don't touch me at all, and that's why I've got to look after you, I suppose. I think you a thundering nuisance now, and I'll probably think you something worse when you've got me back to Sydney and Haddington. But I can't help that. You've got to clear out of this, and as I s'pose you won't go alone I'll have to take you. And I'm hanged if I don't wish I'd never seen you, Dick."

"I don't want to go," said Dick, and began to whimper. Kava drinking and other things had weakened more than his will.

Kin moved impatiently.

"D'you think I want to go either? But as I brought you into this, it's only right that I should take you out of it. An' I'll never be responsible for living man or woman again, if I know it. I like a free hand. We'll go to-morrow, Dick, an' you can thank Père Eugène for it."

"I'll be eternally hanged if I thank anybody for interfering with me," said Dick in unsteady wrath. But some ten days later he came back to clean sense, and to understanding of the mercy which Kin had dealt him stern-handed.

This was aboard a little tramp steamer that raved through the level green seas with her nose laid straight for Sydney Heads, and Dick had just discovered Kin

perambulating the wet deck with set jaws and head low.

"Pain bad?" he asked, startled. For it had not been the fashion to inquire after Kin's injuries this last fortnight.

Kin bit on his lip to steady it.

"Middling bad, thanks. Change of atmosphere, I suppose. I've been scribbling a bit, and that roused the darned thing up. You go below, Dickie, and whack the 'old piano-thing. It's too cold for little boys up here. What? No; you can't do anything—except clear out."

Dick went below with a vague form of hero worship waking in him, which took shape in after years in a manner that bothered Kin distinctly. The cold wind and the pain that clawed from his right jaw down to his finger tips presently sent Kin to the stoke-hole for comfort. Here was red warmth—and ease from the dread which had gripped him when the neuralgic nerves began to leap again. For the sudden rush of half-forgotten suffering sickened him, and brought a space of blank fear.

The great furnace doors were open, and Kin watched the cunning arm-fling that strewed the glowing scarlet with a level black mask.

"Pretendin' there ain't a Hell there all the time, are you?" he said. "It won't do, you know. Hiding it only makes it burn the hotter."

A fireman stopped with his shovel half loaded, and his eyes lighting in his blackened face.

"My oath," he said. "You're about in the right there. So you are, sure 'nough. But you're young to know it."

"A chap doesn't always count understanding by age," said Kin, and moved aside from a swift half-naked body that swung the doors shut again.

The knowledge that he had paid his just debt to Dick was of no consolation to Kin on the grey evening when the tramp grunted her slow way to anchor, past the great smoking P. & O. boats and the discordant life that surged on the wharves.

He loathed the sight of Sydney with a helplessness that was new and terrible, and swore fretfully as a river steamer laden with picknickers and hideous with accordions plunked cheerfully in their wake. Dick was thumping the rail.

"Hear 'em," he said. "Pigs, aren't they? What a row to come back to! D'you remember Maia and Talona singing on that sandy spit under the tongue of Mafesa Pier, Kin? An' they call this music, I s'pose. Why doesn't somebody sink 'em?"

Kin grunted.

"The average Australian uses an accordion in place of a soul, I think. It will suit any surroundings—and it'll stand lots o' rough knocks. Which is just as well, for it's bound to get 'em."

The boats fell level as the steamer backed to the wheel, and above the jerky irresponsible chorus of

"Oh, my dar-ling Clem-en-taine,"

rolled a stronger beat with a grim skirl in it,

"Oh, cru-el laights o' London,
On te-ears your——"

Then a coal hulk blundered out of the closing eye of day, blackening the hazy water-greys, and filling all the twilight with her wallowing.

She passed, and the undaunted terminal came, mellowed by the distance that smothered Clementine.

". . . Hearts are bre-aking
'Neath the lights o' London town."

Kin shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes looked queer. He had come back to the lights of Sydney

with more than he had taken away; and the half-raw scar on his arm twitched as though a cheerful little devil sharpened his tail down the length of it.

Muir greeted his sub with delight such as he showed to few men.

"Carton has been making me fair sick," he said. "An' I thought he could write a decent screed once. Are ye fit for ye're wark, Kin? Ye look no so bad, an' ye sent me fine stuff last mail."

"I'm picking up all right, thanks. Sorry I missed two mails. Is Haddington still in Sydney?"

"He is; an' wearying to see ye."

"That's nice of him. I'll hunt him up in the morning. I've brought back news up to date, Muir. Did you send out Ferris when you got my cable?"

"Certainly. He's not much good, but the public is losing interest in Samoa, anyway. The Elections are comin' on, an' Haddington is standing for Eumaranga."

"Is he?" Kin woke to sudden alertness. "Glad you told me. I must certainly go over and congratulate him in the morning. Now, tell me about things, Muir. I've only had a square inch of the world to bite on for months."

Kin went out next day with a grin on his mouth and the spring of battle in his feet. He put Dick aboard a New Zealand boat, shying impatiently from his outspoken laments.

"I've been an ungrateful dog to you, Kin; but on my honour——"

"Oh, let that up, will you? I'm not grateful to you for bringin' me back, and you've no call for gratitude yourself. So-long. Got all your fixings? Yes; I'll come down and worry you some time. Yes; this year, perhaps."

Then he went to see Haddington.

Haddington was suave from the thin sleeked hair of his narrow head to the gloss of his narrow boots. He had a buttonhole of berries, and a chair on the wide verandah where the winter sun fell warm, and he was all sweetness to Kin; for the double handful of stories that Kin had left behind had been sown broadcast through the Colonies, and taken root and flourished.

Each man had much to hide from the other; but it was only Kin who knew this. He appreciated the lead given him, and went into action gaily.

"Sit down, sit down," said Haddington. "It's pleasant to see you again, my dear boy. Will you—ah—have a cigarette? A cigar, then? No? Still the same old pipe, Kin? Ah, well; you don't—ah—forget old friends, eh?"

"Nor old enemies," suggested Kin, settling his back against the verandah post.

"Ah—really. Is there perhaps more in that remark than appears on the surface?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Kin cheerfully. "Depends on how deep your penetration goes, Haddington."

Haddington's face sicklied, and he opened and shut the lid of his silver cigarette case with an insistence that betokened nervousness.

"Ha, ha," he said feebly. "You have such an amusing way of putting things, Kin. One might almost imagine that you—ah—had something—ah—unpleasant to say to me."

"So I have," said Kin stolidly. "Something uncommonly unpleasant, as I think you'll find."

"What? What? You can't have heard—I sent special injunctions—ah—*what* is it?" cried Haddington, shaking uncontrollably.

Kin drew a deep breath, and stood up straight.

He knew the measure of his man, and he meant to hit hard.

"How many vessels have you chartered to smuggle munitions of war to Mataafa's men, Haddington? Pardey didn't have luck with his lot, and Grant was feeling a bit sick about it when I was round at your plantation. He's very keen in your interests, is Grant."

Haddington crumbled into an old man suddenly, and his chin sagged pendulous with terror.

"It's lies—lies. On my soul you're lying. I—ah—I know nothing. Nothing at all, I tell you."

"Oh, I think you do," said Kin encouragingly. "Grant and Diego were under that impression, anyway. Try and wake up your memory a bit, Haddington. You have got a lot to answer for on that same plantation, you know—let alone the other business."

Haddington gripped the chair arms, steadying himself for a reply, and Kin watched with a cruel little smile on his lips.

Kin had all an Englishman's love of fair dealing, and all a young man's disregard for the future. And so he acted as he thought best, neither forgetting nor fearing the strength of Haddington's weapons. His slow voice slid in on the other man's silence.

"I met one of your runners-up just now, and he asked me to go down to Eumaringa and give the folk a bit of talkee about you. Said that I could p'raps tell 'em more than he could, an' that I might get you a hatful of votes. I said I thought so too, an' I'm goin' this week. I'm not a first-class hand at a speech, but I guess I can make this pretty interesting."

Haddington sprang up with a yell of fury.

"You daren't. You daren't. By——, if you do
——"

"Well?" said Kin.

His hands were out of his pockets, and every muscle was waking. But his tongue held the old drawl.

Haddington's eyes met his; and Kin looked behind them into the sinful soul, and knew just why he had hated Haddington always.

"You can't substantiate anything. I'll have you up for libel. I'll cut off your supplies, and you can't keep yourself on half profits of your writing. I'll—ah—ruin you. I won't give you another penny—"

"Won't you? I'm not so sure. You can't break your contract unless I break mine. And I don't think that would suit your book."

Kin was thinking purely of his monetary value; but Haddington's thoughts ran further. He sat down again in acquiescing silence.

"No," said Kin; "I thought you wouldn't. And so for the nineteen months remaining to our contract, I mean to bleed you as per ordinary, my friend. But," and his voice took on the ring of a military order, "that money will go to the Blind Asylum, or the Home for Inebriates, or a scholarship for Broken-down Card-sharppers, or anything else I jolly well please. You needn't think I'd touch a dirty penny of it myself. Not if I have to go back to the Paroo again."

"You—ah—will not do that," said Haddington suavely. "If you fail to—ah—keep yourself and to make a name, I have guaranteed to look after you for seven years, Kin. And I do not break my word."

Kin shivered involuntarily. For the battered nerves of his arm twitched as if they understood.

"Ah, yes; awfully good of you, I'm sure. But I have no intention of putting you to all that expense. And—er—with regard to that series of sketches in the *Mail*, I don't think it'll pay you to be nasty about 'em. You'll have something to shell out over that jettisoned

cargo, I should think. P'raps your constituents will give you a leg-up when I tell 'em all about it."

But Haddington turned on him, and cursed him through his days and his nights, and cursed the work that should come from his pen, and the desires and loves and prides that should fill his years. And Kin answered him in ribald scorn, and thereafter walked away, light-hearted in his own conceit.

That night he went down to the *Boomerang* office, and a note scrawled with his name stared at him from the rack. He read it, sitting on the desk corner with the catch of a music-hall song on his lips. Then his face hardened, and he went over the half-dozen lines again slowly.

"Dear Severne—I much regret that necessary economy has made it imperative for me to reduce my staff. As Carton is an older hand than yourself, I have arranged for him to take over the chief part of your work in addition to his own at a slightly increased salary. I will attend to the balance myself. Consequently I shall not require your services beyond the end of the current month. Trusting that this will not inconvenience you——" Then came Muir's name in an illegible scrawl.

"Hum," said Kin, digesting this slowly. "Carton will take over my work, will he? And a nice fist he'll make of it, too. Now, I wonder——" He slapped his thigh suddenly, letting out a laugh that rang in the empty room. "First blood to Haddington, by Jove! Didn't take him long, either." He chuckled until wrath against Muir came uppermost. "Not exactly what you might call a friendly thing to do—even if Haddington is pulling the wires, as I've had reason to believe more than once." He picked up his pen regretfully, and put it down again. "I did give him some real good Samoan stuff, too—an' I've

kept no copyright. Hum; guess I'd better have a private interview out of this."

He got up, and climbed the stair to Muir's room. Muir had a vile temper, and the blue honest Scotch eyes. He looked over his glasses as the door opened, and mentally prepared for battle. And in his heart he was cursing Haddington without hesitation.

Kin came over, and leaned against the wall by Muir's elbow.

"What's the reason for this, old chap?" he asked, indicating the note in his hand.

Muir had been prepared for many modes of attack; but this one upset him.

"I—er—I telt ye, lad. I could do nought else as maitters stood. Ye—ye have the rights o' it in that paper."

"No, I haven't," said Kin imperturbably. "I've come for them now. When did you see Haddington last, Muir?"

The Scotsman turned a violent red, and he bridled in his seat.

"Look ye here; if ye think I canna manage my own affairs wi'oot Hadding——"

"All right," said Kin, nodding. "I see. Yes, I thought that was it. I just wanted to make sure."

"I never telt ye anything. It's penury, I telt ye; an' not Haddington. Why should it be Haddington? Why should he turn ye from the billet he foun' ye—ahem—that I foun' ye at his insteagation?"

"I could tell you if you needed to know. But I'd rather not. Perhaps you may guess next week. And—you'll be writing Haddington up about this election business, of course. I'd advise you to tip it pretty strong. Honest dealing, y' know, an'—oh, yes—say how he scorns to push an advantage. You know all about it, Muir——"

"Ye impident laddie," thundered Muir, casting back to Scotland for his language; "gin ye bring ony mair insinuations tae me I'll be showin' ye the door wi' the toe o' ma boot. Haddington's a douce mon, an' gin he is ower thrang o' times, I'll warrant ye deserved all he's gi'en ye."

"Ah," said Kin, with a twinkle. "You own that he did give it, then?"

"Get oot." Muir subsided into his seat, and tossed his papers with the method of an enraged bull. "Get awa! I've no time tae be listenin' tae ye're havers. Ye're ower quick i' the uptake, an' ower ready wi' ye're tongue tae get along i' this warld."

Kin lifted himself lazily, shrugging his shoulders.

"I'm going. And the end of the month's to-morrow, isn't it? Shall I see Carton to-night, and put him up to the ropes? He may be an older hand than I am——"

"Severne! I'm no sayin', but I'm fell sorry ower this. It's none o' my doin', lad. But when a mon has a family, an' no capital o' his own—an' wi' compecteetion increasin' every year——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Kin, with native lordliness. "I don't blame you. It's a little joke of Haddington's, an' I'm goin' to make him sit up for it directly." Then his business training dropped on him with the strike of the clock. "Those notes on irrigation sent over to my room yet?"

"They are," said the editor, taking up his pen. "They are; and ye must follow, or there'll be a block on the presses this hour. We'll talk the maitter ower i' the morn, Severne. I'll do for ye what I can, lad."

But it was not much that the editor of the *Boomerang* could do for Kin. For in the next week Kin spoke openly against his benefactor, and brought accusations with only his sworn word to back them. This caused men to talk of ingratitude and want of principle, and

earned him his first rejected manuscripts. To live, a working man needs regular employment; to be famous, he needs time for his own private work. Haddington's swift stroke had cut both these props from Kin very completely, and Kin, recognising it fully, departed from his methods not one whit. He changed his two rooms for one in a poorer quarter near the wharves, cut down expenses relentlessly, and took, without exception, all such work as he could get. But he was not facile; and the writing up of racing fixtures and regattas meant more weary labour than he could give without feeling it, and the sordid life of the hand-to-mouth literary hack began to press him and to sicken him. One day Haddington's opponent caught him at a street corner and offered its weight in money for all such stuff as Kin would write concerning Haddington's private life. But this was no temptation.

"I've told you all I've found out for myself," said Kin; "an' I'd tell you more if I could. But his private life doesn't belong to you or me—for which you may give thanks; an' so far as he has trusted me with it I'll keep it to myself. Oh yes; folk ain't calling me exactly honourable just now, I know, an' I don't blame you for insultin' me. You didn't know any better. Ta-ta."

Then he went home, and found a typed note from Haddington demanding half-profits on the week's work.

This put him into an absolutely sinful temper; after which he cleared out his pockets, made up the required amount, and posted it.

". . . An' that leaves me three-an'-fivepence to go on the bust with till the next cash rolls in. But he hasn't called time for me yet, and by all the pluck in the world, he shan't. I'm goin' on to the top, Haddington, my friend, an' it'll take more than you to

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stop me. But I wish I hadn't got such a beastly appetite."

If the outside world had known more than showed on the surface it might have been interested. But Kin shouldered the burden which his severance from the *Boomerang* and his frank unshaken denunciation of Haddington had laid there, and went his way, defiantly and without excuses. He wrote pot-boilers, and loathed himself for doing it. He gave up walking, because it made him hungry; and the devil of neuralgia ate into his nerves daily, and began to show in his face.

One day came Haddington's cheque after his side of the bargain, and Kin handled it greedily.

"He won't know," he said. "I told him I'd give it to some charity, an' so I will—afterwards. But I want it myself just now. Oh, I want it."

He carried it to the window, turning it over and over to the light. Below, the black tangle of wharves lay in a sea of opal, and the sky bent over them, pure green, and flushed to horizon where the round hills met it. A big P. & O. moved out on the homeward trail with placidly smoking funnels, and the whole light-bathed world smote the jangled chords of Kin's being.

"What can I do? What can I do? I'm writing clap-trap day and day without redemption. I'm ruining my work. It'll go down an' wash along in the gutter with all the rot ever written by men who go under. An' then Haddington gets what he want o' me. The Devil alone knows what that is." He dropped his head on his arms. "I give up," he said. "I must have time for my own work. I must use—this."

It was an hour-long fight, and Kin came out of it weary and uncertain. Because his work was his

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religion, and because it had already been soiled by contact with Haddington, he had said in his pride that it should be beholden to Haddington no more. And yet he spread the little slip of paper on his knee in the waning light, and considered the many things he might buy with it.

"Three meat meals a day, an' a new pair of boots, an'——" he twisted the thing up suddenly, and tossed it into the dust on the cupboard top "an' I can't do it. I must manage along somehow, I guess."

Five nights later Kin stood in the street for three hours, watching the election numbers go up on the great hoardings. With all his cunning and all his strength he had worked against Haddington, and men knew it. As the crowd packed and loosened again he heard his name more than once, and then the tail of a sentence that stung him.

". . . Must be making a tidy little pile out of it. Macleay gave him fifty down to speak against Haddington at Eumaringa. I know that for a fact."

Kin backed three paces, trod on the speaker's toe, wheeled, and spoke.

"I'd like substantiation for that fact, Mr. Scott. Who told you I was making a pile?"

He looked lean and worn; his eyes were strained, and there was no youth in them. Somebody sniggered, and cried:

"Yer don't like it, Severne. My oath, yer don't. What a-yer gettin' yourself inter trouble fer, then?"

"Not for money," said Kin, and his voice rung out in contempt. "Do you fools think I did it for money?"

"You're a bigger fool if you didn't," said Scott.

The crowd swung them apart again, and Kin pressed up to the hoardings, understanding.

"Sydney downed me once," he said. "Looks like she's going to do it twice—if Haddington loses."

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Haddington lost his seat by five votes, and Kin was hooted and cheered as he elbowed his way home. He took the last step at a run, bolted his door, lit the lamp, and flung off his coat.

"Let 'em say what they like," he said. "Let 'em think what they like. I don't care. But I must get out o' this into my own world—quick. For I'm not taking any pride in myself just now."

He filled his pipe with hands that shook, and drew pens and paper to him. He was half drunk with weariness and shame and wrath, and quite desperate with longing for the highest, finest thoughts which had been holding the back of his brain unavailingly against the petty matters that troubled his days.

The maid-of-all-work received no answer when she hammered on his door in the morning. The bolt still held when she whined Kin's name through the keyhole at midday; and though the landlord forced entrance before night, Kin promptly turned him out by the shoulders.

"I've got bread and cheese," he said. "And a pipe. And I'm busy. Get out. I'll open the door when I'm ready. An' tell that girl I put a bit of rag in the keyhole."

Then he went back to his writing.

He owed money on more than one count, and for this work he would not be paid on the nail. But he was past thought of all but the story that was living—in his brain—in the room—in the swift hot words that ran from his pen.

At the early evening of the third day he signed his name across the half of the last sheet, tied it up, addressed it to a publisher in the city, took it down to the nearest pillar-box and dropped it in. A giddiness caught him as he climbed the stairs again, and he fell on his bed headlong, and slept the sleep of the dog-tired.

Something woke him wide-eyed in the black hours. He came to his feet half blindly, feeling for the touch of Laleefa's hands. The murmur that never stills in a big city was the wash of waves on a sandy shore, and the heat of the little room was no more than the evening warmth under the cocoa palms. He heard his voice as the voice of one far away.

"It's good. I tell you it's good. What do you say? It could have come true if I'd liked. She would have given her soul for me. What? You know she would. It isn't a pretty story? I never said it was. But it's life. It's life, I tell you. There's all the South Seas in it—and there's Laleefa—she's dead. I can make what I like of her life. If I choose to make her a sinner, it's no business of yours, Père Eugène. It is art. That comes first. Grant and Diego may read it—and Dick. I don't care. I never promised to keep her memory clean. You're talking rot, Père Eugène."

He stumbled across to the window and flung it open. A breath of less heated air blew on the throbbing veins of his forehead. He leant his head out, and laughed weakly.

"Best bit of work I ever did," he explained. "An' somebody wants me to kill it. That's you, Père Eugène. What does it matter? She's dead. No one owes another—that much. The best bit of work I've done yet."

All the stars of the sky lay at gaze above him, and by power of their wide pure calm something stirred and wakened in Kin: the something which every man must learn if he would bite to the true core of life. It begins with honour, and ends with brotherly love.

Kin knelt long with one knee on the sill, and his forehead pressed to the upper pane. He knew the

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worth of his story well. He knew that it was cruel, and tender, and ruthless, and tingling with life. And he knew that it smudged the dead girl's name for always.

For the first time a woman fought with Kin against his work, and before day dawn he knew that she had won. But he did not understand why. It was for another to teach him why God gave woman to be tended and revered by man. And in those days the dead Laleefa was forgotten.

Through the morning's rush in the streets he walked down to the publisher's office, and, by virtue of the card he sent up, saw the head without demur. The head was excitable. He effervesced with frothy words before the door closed.

"You have come about your MS., Mr. Severne? I picked it up last evening, and read it before I slept. It is a marvellous piece of work—marvellous. Somewhat—er—ah—unclothed occasionally, if you will allow me to say so. But living—absolutely living. Wonderfully so. I am much pleased that you gave me premier——"

"Thanks," said Kin, bringing his drawl into the eager babble. "I'm afraid I've come to do rather an unusual thing, sir. I must ask you to be good enough to let me have it back."

"To—ah—I hardly understand. Do you mean that I perhaps have not had first refusal?"

"I posted it to you five minutes after I finished it. No one else has seen it. I did not re-read it myself. But I want it back——"

"To make alterations? Oh, ah, yes; I quite understand. A few expressions, as I said——"

"To burn it," said Kin finally.

The publisher took off his spectacles, and his puffy eyes stretched.

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“My dear young sir! My dear young sir! Do you know what you are saying?”

“I generally do,” said Kin curtly, for the tempter was with him.

“Then why—goodness gracious me—my dear Mr. Severne; I have seen a good deal of your work, but never anything to equal this. A few sentences perhaps—but it is distinctly above your average. It shows a broader knowledge of life—it, so to say, it places your work immediately on a higher plane.”

“I know that.”

“Then why—dear, dear—I do not understand. You cannot expect to reach this level every day, Mr. Severne; and as an artist, you owe it to the public to give your best——”

Kin winced.

“We’ll leave that out of the question, if you please. I do not wish to publish it, for several reasons. I shall be greatly obliged to you——”

The head was difficult to convince; and when Kin lost his temper it did not lessen the friction. But in the end he carried his story home and re-read it. Then he shredded it out into a flutter of loose leaves, and burnt it up in the empty grate. And his mind ran back to the spare grey priest as he beat the crisping ash with the poker, feeling no glory of soul in his renunciation.

“I’ve kept my word to you, my friend, at the cost of the best bit of writing I’ve ever done in my life. It was good,” said Kin, flinging down the poker—
“d—— good. It would have shut Haddington’s mouth for a time, and netted me forty guineas—put that at the upset price. And what shall I say to Haddington when he asks how long I mean to go on writing drivel?”

In the next month came the dust and languid heat

of early summer. Kin worked doggedly, sickened body and soul by the job-man's stuff he wrote for his living, and by the knowledge that the quality of his worshipped art was suffering. The neuralgia tortured him in the night watches, and clouded his brain; and half the doctors in town told him to take rest—absolute rest. Kin nearly called them names to their faces; went back, handled Haddington's uncashed cheques, laid his head on the table, and cried. For a loud-tongued terror sat up in his brain, and told him that he would never write again as he had written.

Then Dick sent a letter over seas, calling him for old acquaintance's sake to come; Kin counted out his store of pennies and pounds, walked across to the wharves, and took a steerage passage by the next steamer.

After this he felt it incumbent on him to tell Haddington. They had not met since the elections, and Kin's jauntiness did not serve to hide the trouble which Haddington delighted to see in his face.

"I'm goin' to New Zealand," said Kin, without preamble. "I want a change, and I want to write a book, so I'm goin' to New Zealand. What? well; I'll probably be away some months, and you won't see my book till it's printed. But that won't matter to you. You'll get your blood-money all right, and it won't be a sum to sniff at either."

"You—ah—have not lost your conceit," said Haddington viciously; "and unless your book is better than the stuff which you have—ah—been dribbling out since last autumn I shall not consider myself——"

"You will always consider yourself," said Kin. "As long as you live. Yourself, and no one else. But I understand all right. An' I sympathise with your little game, Haddington. You can serve your

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writ on me when time's up—if the public ain't purring over me by then. An' I won't kick. But there are near seventeen months to run yet, my friend—an' a chap can make or miss a world in that time."

CHAPTER VII

"SUCH JOY SHE HAD IN LIVING"

—(Old Song)

"DON'T do it, Doody. Ah-h!—Don't!"

"Just one, Josie. Honour bright. But a pot-shot from that distance, you know——"

Two swift brown hands came over the boy's arm.

"It's too glorious a day to kill anything—even a gull. Give me that; do, please, please."

The steel glint in Doody's hand was the line of a rifle barrel. The other steel glint in his eyes was the mark of the sportsman. He hesitated, swinging to cover still the white flash wheeling above the rock pools where they flushed with the rising tide.

"A fellow never gets a show with you, Josie. You always make a shine when I want to do a bit of shooting."

"I can't help it. Everything's so lovely." She loosed her hands and flung them out. "Look at the sun across the sea—and the wind blowing the tussock—and just that puff of smoke in the sky above the bush line."

Doody's eyes dropped on her in straight admiration.

She was only an unformed girl, with a thin face and a cotton frock. But the very joy of living showed in every line of her.

". . . And Josie in a blue sunbonnet," he finished gravely.

She jerked it off, bringing the red-brown hair in a tumble round her eager face.

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“You’ve broken the contract, Doody. You have! You have! You promised you wouldn’t be stupid for a month, and it’s only four days. Now I’ll take my forfeit. Give me the gun——”

“It’s a rifle——”

“Anything that shoots is a gun, really. Give it up.”

She took it with a quick twist, and fled barefoot through the little waves to a brown rock cleft by a trough where sea anemones swayed, crimson, topaz and creamy pink.

“I’ll just put it in here to keep cool. Ah-h! Hands off, Doody. I’ll tell Dick——”

“Hang Dick,” said Dick’s cadet, laying forcible hands on his rifle. “Josie, you’d tease the life out of a wooden Maori god. And I didn’t mean that you were lovely. It was the bonnet.”

The bright face broke into dimples of laughter, and she poised her slim body on the rock edge like a sea swallow ready to fly.

“Yes; it’s lovely, isn’t it? I starched it with raw starch, and scorched it in the ironing, and Katty said: ‘Saint Pether, but ye’ll frighten the fish in it, Josie; an’ why shouldn’t ye, then?’ But I’ll tell her you’re blinder than fish.”

“’Fraid not.” Doody shaded his eyes, looking back across the foreshore, and up the river that gaped in a wide loose mouth to the sea.

The river was made of a dazzle of sinuous streams and livid shingle and driftwood; and the low terraces flanking it to windward and leeward fell to the water by way of yellow tussock, or blue crumbling papa rock, or china-white quartz. Heavy bush of a million colours and hopeless perspective held the hills at head of the black narrow gorge, and the dull red note struck out of the greens on the right bank was the hematite roof of Dick’s house.

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But it was not the roof that made Dick's cadet tuck his rifle into his armpit with a grunt, and wade landward dejectedly.

“It is Dick. I hoped it was a shepherd. Come along, Josie; that everlasting beggar's always poking round to spoil sport.”

“We'll make him gather driftwood,” declared Josephine, dancing alongside. “I haven't got nearly enough. Let's work hard, Doody, and then he can't refuse to help. Quick!”

She ran past him, and darted round the undercut cliff to the backwater where the river cast up her refuse. Here was a very Golgotha of the brittle skeletons of kingly trees; writhed into tortured shapes, with skinny limbs bared shamelessly, or rotting in sand-covered silence through the trampling years.

Doody followed obediently, laid aside his rifle, and grubbed in the sand with an energy that made him deaf to Dick's speech as horse and man slid down the crumbling cutting in a whirl of dust.

Josie glanced up, shaking the hair back from her face.

“That cutting's not safe, Dick. It makes me creep all over the back of my neck to see anyone ride down it. Just s'pose Polly fell.”

“She'd better not. Doody, did Palethorpe shoe the chestnut? Think I'll go down tandem for Severne after lunch.”

Doody nodded. He was flat-thighed, and lithe as a wildcat, with the slow dreamy movements of a colonial who has found romance before manhood.

“Yes. Palethorpe put on leather, and the brute kicked all the way home. Seen Marshall?”

“I did. He'll be round for the cattle in the morning. My faith, it's hot!”

Dick slid off, bringing the rein over the mare's

head, and sat on the crooked arm of a dead totara. The very atmosphere prickled with flaring heat; but Josephine's brown cheeks were cool and firm as she rose up demurely, dusting the sand from her frock.

"Dick's sitting on a tree, and Doody's got both hands in his pockets, and—I am doing all the work myself. We haven't got half a load yet, Dick, and I'm afraid the Black Draught will get sick of it directly, and bolt home."

Dick cast an eye up the warm yellow terrace where an old cart horse, with dropping head and jaws and hollow back like the curve of a young moon, altered the horizon. And he grinned.

"I'm afraid she will—when she wakes up. You've got all she can pull, anyhow. Don't be greedy, Jo."

"No wood no fire, no fire no gingerbread for you the next time you come, Dick. And I've got a blister—look! Well—you might carry my bundle up the hill, anyway."

"*Your* bundle? It was built for six men, that. And tied with one of my plough reins, too. Doody, I told you——"

"I took it," said Josephine, rocking on slim bare heels and toes where the warm sand spread. "And I expect Doody can carry the sticks if you can't."

Doody chuckled at the mischief in her face. It was Dick's pride to be considered strong in the land.

"Doody! I'd like to see him! Give it to me, then. Jo! it's half fuchsia. I'm not going to take that stuff to stink the house out."

"I want the fuchsia for Katty. She hasn't been cross for three days, and that's not good for her. She'll be cross when she fills up the stove with fuchsia. I think it has really the nastiest smell in the world—except your pipe."

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“You’re an imp, Jo. And you know Katty can’t tell cabbage tree from manuka. I’ll take this instead.”

He stooped to a half-buried tree stump that Doody had wrestled with an hour since; and the two who stood by hugged themselves in uncurbed joy.

It took Dick five minutes to discover that the tree roots were fastened to Eternity. In the sixth he sat suddenly on the sand, grasping the rotten top in both hands. His red face was beaded, and his breath short and stertorous; but Josephine scorned the collapsed bundle frankly.

“Up you get and grub it, Dick. No, Doody shan’t help you. You said you’d get it, and I don’t like people who break their word.”

“D’you prefer people who break their backs, then? That thing’s a brute.” He kicked it savagely. “I’d as soon try to pull up the what’s-its-name tree of Death.”

“Oh! I wish you could,” cried Josephine, with a great light coming into her eyes. Then she shut up her hands suddenly. “No—I don’t. Some people shouldn’t live for always.”

“For instance——” suggested Doody, offering a bludgeon for his superior’s head. But Josephine’s thought had sunk to a rarely probed deep in her. “For instance—those who haven’t got anyone to love them. If I loved people and they didn’t love me, I wouldn’t want to live—even if the manuka was in flower and the fish were coming up the river.”

Dick flopped to his knees in mock terror.

“Josephine, an’ you love me, I beseech you not to love me very much. For I’m not in the habit of returning things given me, and if I didn’t return your affection you might possibly—er—ah—kick the bucket.”

Doody swung round with an angry flush, but Josephine’s chin was up in unabashed derision.

"You! No, thank you. And you never return anything that's lent you, either. How about that guinea pig?"

"I brought it back," said Dick, his light eyes wide opened.

"Yes, when you knew it was going to die."

"Die!" with a shout of injured wrath. "Die! I like that! You dropped the potato bucket on it."

Doody sniggered, and Josephine turned in dignity to the brushwood, winging the men with a right and left.

"That doesn't alter the fact in the least. You brought it back, and it died at once. Don't try to argue, Dick. Your arguments are worse than Doody's jokes, and he's a better beast of burden than lion comique any day—even though he does let me load up the dray by myself."

"I—I—look here, Josie, let me do it."

Doody staggered cheerfully across the shingle and up the cutting to the rickety dray, that shone like a golden chariot in the sunlight. Josephine followed after, with a lilt of song on her lips, and bare brown feet that called up the devil in Dick. And thus it was that she met the startled Doody at the dray head with an icy stateliness that had frozen the sunshine in her eyes.

"Doody, you will please tell Dick—Doody, don't I always do as I like?"

The boy flung the last stick on the cart, and pulled the flannel collar on his wet neck.

"You do so," he said truthfully.

"And I always shall do as I like. Always. I won't wear shoes and stockings if I don't want to. Dick says—it's not Dick's business if I choose to wear them for earrings." She turned on the emphatic boots sounding behind her, and her manner was that of

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a queen. “I consider you exceedingly impertinent, Dick,” she said.

Doody regarded the arched foot on the springy tussock with covert worship. But he remembered certain embargos laid upon him.

“Mrs. Cunliffe likes you to have ‘em, doesn’t she, Josie?”

“I have got them—in the dray somewhere.”

Dick shut up the tailboard with a truculent air.

“Well—if that isn’t one of the sneakiest ways——”

His teeth chattered on his tongue under force of a swift strong box on the ears, and he caught Josephine’s arm in white-hot fury.

“By George! If you do that again, Jo——”

“I’ll do it as often as you deserve it,” said Josephine, and met his angry eyes defiantly. “How dare you call me a sneak, Dick? Do you think I won’t tell Grannie that I took them off?”

Dick laughed awkwardly, and flung the arm away.

“Some poor beggar will have the breaking of you one day, Miss Jo. But I won’t be the man, thank goodness.”

“Thank goodness,” repeated Josephine lightly. “I wonder you haven’t learnt that before now.” Then she climaxed matters with her usual directness. “You’re clever enough with your hands, Dick; but I can’t say you’re much good with your tongue. You’ve no more tact than a ripe gooseberry—and it just splatters the universe when you pinch it.”

Doody was enjoying himself considerably. He woke the Black Draught in hushed delight, and swung himself to the shaft.

“Come on, Josie. I’ll go over and help you unload if you hurry up.”

“Doody, you’re a cherub. I looks towards you. Ta-ta, Dickie; I’ve forgiven you—Oh Dick! Dick!”

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“Great Scott! Don’t grip my arm like that, Jo; what is it? Jo——” But his eyes followed her strained ones; and he said something not meant for her to hear, and plunged headlong down the tussock to the blurr of heat-run shingle.

CHAPTER VIII

DICK'S CHOICE

It was a bi-weekly train running presumably amok through parts of Southern Otago that decanted Kin and a portmanteau and several other people at a siding, and straightway departed into Infinity with a snort of relief.

Kin shouldered his baggage down into the bare street, helped the coach driver yoke up his team, handed a fat woman and a girl with a squint up to the box seat, and finally took place beside the driver, and lit his pipe.

"Fifteen miles to the township, isn't it?" he said. "Yes; I thought so." Then he mentioned Dick's house. "Four miles farther? Can I walk it?"

"Yer can swim if yer like—or take a hoss. But there's mostly somebody down in the arternoons, Tuesd'y an' Sat'd'y. Did they know yer was comin'?"

"I wrote. Never mind. That'll wait. Say; that off-wheeler's raw, isn't she?"

The driver dropped his voice.

"Fust time she's bin in. An' that old biddy looks somethin' of a squealer if so be there's a kick-up, eh?"

Kin glanced sidelong. The old woman was round as a puff-ball, and her flat face was like a fried egg. She gripped an umbrella and a bag of peppermints, and her prunella boots swung six inches from the bottom.

"She does," he assented. "Who is she?"

“Servant to the Cunliffe’s—what live op’site where you’re goin’. I ain’t druv her up here before.”

The coach took the corner of the street on one wheel, crossed a culvert, and thundered up a steep hill beyond. The unwarmed team canted all ways, and Kin found supreme enjoyment in the delicate handling that curbed and urged and gentled them, without haste and without exertion. Then a leader tripped on a stone, and the long whip sang out in warning. A shrill voice followed.

“Dad, then, an’ is ut eggs ye think ye’re batin’ that away? Putt up yer whup, cusheen—or give ut tu me, now. There’s foine throuble ye’ll be makin’ in a minyut at that game.”

“Sit tight,” said the driver to Kin. “And grab her if she tries to fall out. What? P’raps I can hold ’em. Don’t know.”

On the very crest of the hill the raw mare had pulled her trace clear of the inside pole. It was quite certain that she would climb over things when she had time. But the outside edge of a tussock cutting that dropped at a thirty grade was not the place to make time. Kin humped himself, and chuckled a little, forgetting all but the glorious roar of hoofs, and the rush of wind through the great air spaces. Black distant mountains propped the low sky leftward and ahead; but to the right soft curves of tussock with the sheep-trodden smell that pulls at the heart of an Australian. Where the world sank sheer from the coach side a trout stream babbled through flax, and a sod where trimmed with tin suggested a Chinaman’s home. Kin sighed, happily as a baby, with the rock of the coach to soothe him. It was the dear well-loved life of Up-Country again, with the stern nakedness of drought and starvation swelled into fatness of water and tall grass and sleek cattle.

"This fills the bill," he murmured. "I don't want anythin' more to-day. Great goodness, old lady; where——"

"Pull up, thin, will ye? Tell himsilf tu pull up. I want tu git out. Weary on ye for men, then—will ye not pull up?"

"Sorry," said Kin, getting both arms round her. "I've no desire to be familiar, you know; but I really can't let you take a header over there. Not enough water for a bath, I assure you."

Then he glanced fearfully at the squint-eyed girl. But she looked at the driver in a placid trustfulness such as Kin had seen on the faces of women before—when in touch with the men whom they love.

"An' that's all right," he muttered. "Now, old lady——"

"Take yer hands off me, an' why shouldn't ye then? Arrah!—I'll give ye the taste of me tongue in a minyut! Wait till I be tellin' the mistress ov ye, young man—an' Josie."

"Tell 'em all you like," said Kin cheerfully; and loosed her, and came down over the dashboard promptly as the driver pulled up with a threefold rein twist round his wrists.

"Just the tongue come out," he reported, bringing his hand over the mare's quarter as one who knows how. "She's all right; only scared. I'll put in a stick."

He snatched a branch of manuka scrub and whittled it, talking to the mare the while; and the driver said:

"She's bucketted herself a bit—right you are—you're a loss to the service, an, that's true enough—but p'raps you belong, eh?"

"No," said Kin with his knife between his teeth. "I just understand horses a little—and men." This

last with a grin, as a hand lifted from the reins to meet a girl's freckled one on the seat back.

Then Kin climbed back to talk about many things, and to let the clean glad air take the dust and sorrow of the Sydney streets from his forehead and eyes. And he picked some knowledge of New Zealand townships from the shy chatter of the girl, and much misunderstanding of station life from the old woman. But he and the driver spoke of the galloping days over gum-scrub country, and the clink of stirrup and rifle. For they both had ridden to the tune of it in Birot's Troop on the Adelaide side.

"There's another Birot man in th' township—a half-caste. Keeps the pub, he do. P'raps yer knows him."

"I knew one half-caste," said Kin; "an' I'm going to smash him next time I see him. Great Scott! What a view!"

The team wheeled a sharp rock corner, and a wide valley spread at their feet. Shining water knotted in twisted ribbons over the breast of it; the sides rose with glint of wire fences and grey of sheep to the skyline, and the end closed up in a mountain range piled with bush where the sun fell. A straggling township lay along the east watershed with the yellow of gold workings in the hills behind it, and the black smoke of a dredge somewhere cut clear across a clump of pale willows on the river bank.

"Folk do call it pretty," said the driver. "That's the township. I can give yer some sort o' horse if yer goin' on. But I got ter take another team over ter Waitati this arternoon."

"Anythin' that'll stand up will do. Thanks. Shall I help you down? All right. Don't be shy. I won't cuddle you again."

The old woman came down in a lump, set her

hands on her hips, and reviled the coach and all that belonged thereto in forcible Irish.

"An' I'll tell the misthress on ye, young man, wid yer forwardness——"

"I'll take you up if you like," suggested Kin. "There's room on most horses for two."

But the driver's laugh smothered the answer, and Kin got a crock from the stables, riding slowly up the slab-sided streets with their shanty-like shops and triple hotels and tin-made houses.

"Much the Australian plan—drink, dirt, and do-nothing, I suppose—hallo! What the deuce d'you want?"

It was a cheeky boy with a broken pair of braces, and a hat that let the hair through; and he stood clear in the street centre.

"Are you goin' over the bridge?" he demanded.

"I am. Any objection?"

"The bridge ain't safe for traffic. There's a notice up."

"That's rot," said Kin. "Comyn told me the track."

"Comyn don't take 'is team over it. Tell you, tain't safe. You can go by the ford where you comes out o' the bush."

"Can I? Who put you up to this?"

The boy grinned, spreading his hands through the tattered bottoms of his pockets.

"Well; it's worth sixpence to me if you're right," said Kin, tossing the coin over. "If you're not—just look out when I come this way again."

He crossed fifteen little streams where trout shone in the silvery bottoms, and climbed by way of a good cart road to the bush that guarded the valley end. The bush was thick and dark and moist with mighty trees that made twilight, and ferns that battened on

earth and tree alike, and little waterfalls and springs smothered in moss of any possible colour. A colony of wrens the size of the first joint of the thumb fluttered round him, making a sound such as follows the scratching of a nail on glass. There was no other life in all the great majesty of silence, and Kin made haste to get out of it. The undergrowth was soft with dead leaves of old years. Kin's horse shuffled through them, left the bush behind, and pecked down the cutting that led to the river. Here Kin pulled up and considered.

"That's the road to the bridge, of course—runs up the bed two miles, Comyn said. And that smoke in the trees over there must be Dick's dug-out. An' any fool could cross this collection of gutters that New Zealanders call a river. What was Comyn thinkin' of? If his horse isn't made o' blotting-paper I'll guarantee to go through without gettin' wet."

The sea marked out a straight line to the near right, clapping white hands where the river streams homed to it, and washing over the shingle between with the grate of ripsaws. Kin put the old horse to a canter; came across firm sand and hillocks of grass where hawks nested; ploughed through drift rubbish of wood and sheep bones, and plunged into deep water that shocked him more than a little.

"Mighty deceptive place this—runnin' up, too, begad. Tide must be coming in. Git up, will you."

The bank beyond was grey sand with a wet sheen to it. Kin rode over three chains before he felt it quiver beneath him. Then he pulled up, with all the blood of his body gone to his eyes and his throat.

"Quicksand, by ——. Now—where—what—"

It was a flying figure with the dart of a sand martin; a print skirt brushing his knee, and a vivid eager face close to his.

"Get off! Oh, didn't you hear Dick coo-ee? Get off, and run. It's quicksand! This way."

Kin dropped to the sand promptly. It shivered and sucked at his feet.

"But the horse——"

"Leave it. You must."

Kin felt the swift light strength of her even as her hand shut on his. He ran, with the power lessening at each step. For his boots felt like cupping glasses.

"Up stream," said Josephine. "We can't go back. The tide's coming in, you know."

Her voice was undistressed; but Kin's breath came sharply, and sweat stood on his face. The bleached sand swayed and quaked underfoot; the mutter of the rising sea behind was a threat, and the universe lost shape in a dizzy greyness that blinded his eyes.

Far off Dick was holding Doody by the collar. And Doody cursed him in torment of mind.

"Let me go! Let me go to her! Oh! Call her back."

"I won't. She must save him. I tell you it's Kin."

"Kin! D—— Kin. Dick, it is Josephine! Dick!"

Then Dick made the choice which he was to repeat over again to the sorrow of both.

"I'd rather she stayed there than came without him. Shut up, Doody. We can't do anything."

Josephine's hand tightened on Kin's. She stopped, and sight came back to the man.

"No thoroughfare that way? Where, then?"

"I don't know. You'd be too heavy. Look!"

She showed one slim foot sand smudged above the ankle. It turned Kin sick.

"You're makin' me responsible for your death too," he said roughly. "What can I do?"

Josephine pointed to the stream Kin had crossed.

The tide was in it now, champing white teeth, and fighting the floating drift wood.

"If we can get to it—but I couldn't swim it—could you?"

"Yes," said Kin.

He came twice to his knees on the way. On the brink he caught her shoulder, and his hand was hot through her thin dress.

"It's runnin' like the Rip, an' if you lose your head we're both done. Are you game?"

Josephine met his eyes fearlessly.

"Yes. Be quick!"

The rush of the river was strong, and the backset of tide clamped Kin in a vice. He threshed his way forward with pulses drumming in his ears, and Josephine's grip on his collar to choke him. A comber clapped him over the head to pull Josephine back on the undertow. He caught her, and the wide fear of death was in their eyes. Water gobbled, and splashed the very sky round them. It was salt as tears. Driftwood battered them, and a green branch twisted in Josephine's hair. In mid-stream some anchored barbwire ripped Kin's leg, so that he brought a trail of blood through the backwater where the current ceased, and out on the shingle beyond.

Here he stood, shaking himself after the manner of a stupid bull, and staring at Josephine without speech. Josephine's mouth was trembling, and her frock clung over-closely. But she shook her hair back, and her brave eyes met Kin's in a fellowship that he was slow to recognise.

"Now, we'll have to go home this side. Dick and Doody'll come to meet you."

Kin stood in a little puddle of blood, but he followed her to the track in silence. Then he said:

"That poor brute out there is up to its barrel, an'

I heard it scream once. Will you go home, an' send Dick with a gun an' a trap? I'm afraid I'm too lame —”

“Oh,” cried Josephine, and knelt in the girlish dignity that Doody loved, and knotted his handkerchief about the torn flesh. Kin caught her dress as she rose up.

“Wait a minute. I want to say—I never heard of a pluckier thing than you've done. You should have been a man. I wish you were, an' then I—I'd know what to say. I'm not conceited enough to think you did it for my sake—it was common humanity, I suppose. But I won't forget——”

“Don't speak about it, ever, ever,” cried Josephine. “It was—so terrible. And all the earth is so lovely. I—suppose I'd had to leave it out there!”

Then she fled, with more than river water wet on her face, and Kin lay flat on the shingle.

“The usual result of a short cut,” he explained to Dick, some twenty minutes later. “Why don't you keep your bridges in better repair, eh?”

“Repair,” said Dick. “Repair! Great Scott! man; they're safe for all but a traction engine.”

CHAPTER IX

"YOU'LL SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO, SEVERNE"

"I'VE had enough exercise to-day to kill ten men," said Kin. "But I'm blest if I wouldn't take a little more if I could run across that boy with the broken braces just now."

There were four chairs on the wide verandah of Dick's house, for Kin's bandaged leg had one for itself. There was a table with decanters and glasses, and there was the smell and murmur of yarded sheep breaking through the calm night that was over warm for the middle of April.

Dick grunted, waving his pipe across the orderly slope of paths and gardens to the unseen mutter of the river.

"We'll go down to-morrow, and smell him out, and spank him. Just clean mischief, I'll take my davy. And I'm going to kick up a row with Pete for not giving you my message."

"Never saw the gentleman, to my knowledge."

"Didn't you go to the pub? Why—you old owl—have another drink now, then."

"No," said Kin curtly, arriving at sudden comprehension of the bloatedness of Dick's face as seen by daylight. "I don't drink. Can't afford it."

"You can afford it in this house——"

"Can't, I tell you. Got my work to think of. How's Kathleen Mavourneen to get back to her home, Dick?"

"Katty? Havelock brought her up in the wool

dray, and dropped her at the Cunliffes. You'd better have come that way yourself."

"She's too coy," said Kin, with a grin. "You should have seen her when I offered her a pick-a-back behind me. Dick, that noise of sheep'll send me crazy if I can't handle 'em to-morrow. Dipping, is it?"

"Yes; ten thousand. We're half through. Been stopped by wet."

"Ah-h!" said Kin, and lay back, sucking in full contentment from the pipe, and the cushioned chair, and the peace that stilled the nerves in his temples.

Far across the shade and shine of star-lit water a pale light waggled and dipped. Kin jerked his pipe stem toward it.

"Lost star?" he asked.

"No," said Dick slowly. "A comet, I think. Or a cat's-eye opal. It is Josephine bobbing for eels."

"Oh! A matter-of-fact young lady, isn't she? Not many hours ago she was bobbing for men. Made a good haul, too."

Doody's chair creaked, and he spoke sharply.

"You might call it matter-of-fact to do what she did to-day. I don't."

"What do you call it?" asked Kin lazily.

"The bravest thing a woman *could* do——" the young voice shut off with a gulp, and Kin lifted his eyebrows.

"Of course. An' I'm duly grateful. Very effective thing, too. Think I'll put her in a story some day."

"She won't be grateful for that, then."

Kin twisted to face the other, and the drawling amusement in his tone stung Doody.

"Thanks, much! So you've been reading my yarns?"

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"Every one of them," said Dick in pride. "And Jo, too. I take 'em over to the Cunliffe's, and read them aloud."

"And I think they're beastly," cried Doody hotly. "And so does Josie. I don't believe you have any reverence for—for women, or anything else."

"Don't you?" Kin's voice changed suddenly. "I have reverence for my work—all the reverence a man can give. Other things fall under it naturally, an' I use 'em as I want 'em."

"Don't you dare," cried the boy, who carried the light of Josephine's eyes in his heart. "Don't you dare use Josie in your confounded stories——"

"I will use your Josie exactly as I like—if she makes good copy——"

Doody sprang up, his face scarlet.

"You cad!" he cried, and then Dick caught him by the arm.

Kin re-lit his pipe; and the match flare showed a something in his eyes which did not tally with his words.

"An occasional smacking would do you a lot of good, kid. Better sit down again, eh? All serene, Dick. Don't you get in a lather. I can take care of myself."

"Doody's a cheeky young ass," said Dick shortly.

"Quite so." Kin stretched himself, and yawned. "Dickie, I haven't had a real sleep since the dickens knows when. Think I could do with a milk and soda, and a ten hours' snooze if you have one handy."

Dick's house was fat and broad and red, even as himself. He had built two lop-sided rooms to the end facing the bridge, carpeted and papered them royally, and held them sacred to Kin. Kin shut himself into them, and sat on the bed with his head in his hands.

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“A half-caste who has been in Birot’s Troop. Comyn said that. Then it is possible—by the Lord Harry, if he did set that youngster on——”

Through a half-caste who had once been in Birot’s Troop Kin had been broken at court martial, and sent back to the track. It is true that he took satisfaction with his hands from the half-caste afterwards; but this had not cemented the friendship between them with any certainty.

“Hi-yah! I’ll think it all out in the morning,” said Kin, and went to bed to find the sleep of the dog-tired.

But in the morning all else went from him in the pure joy of getting his hands in wool again, and in smelling the old familiar stench of sheep and heated men and carbolic dip and dust. The great white gum trees shading the dip were taller and straighter than Australia breeds, but the acrid eucalyptus scent was in them; and the men’s quarters on the rise, with a line of kennelled pups tongueing alongside, were such as had been Kin’s home not so many months since. Now he sat on a rail and overlooked the day’s labour, even as Haddington once had done. But this man with the deep-lined jaw and the steady eyes did not watch as one unlearned.

Doody felt it where he slaved at the race, beating the wethers into the dip with a manuka bough; and something more than casual dislike was cold in him. Quicksands where Josephine sank by inches had made his dreams, until he rose at the dawning and crossed to the Cunliffes’ house to throw shingle at Josephine’s turret window. And Josephine had put her head out, and laughed and said:

“Gay as the morning, Doody; an’ why shouldn’t I be, then? How’s the bit of flotsam with the lame leg?”

"Don't know, and don't care. I'm not going to like him, Josie."

And Josephine had laughed again.

"I don't think that'll trouble him much," she said.

Doody believed it, and went back, anxious and afraid. For every lover desires to play the man before the woman he loves, and one had come into Doody's kingdom who was a stronger man than he.

Shouts of men, and clatter of beating sticks, and clamour of dogs on the eternal complaint of sheep; and Kin cuddled his knees, and rocked on the rail in content.

"I can do it now. I can do it! Haddington, my friend; I will work all the days and sleep all the nights, and sit in the sun when I want to. An' I will write the stuff that I came into the world to write, Haddington. There's the very stink of it here— Dick, is that oatmeal and water? Hand it over."

"Come up to the house an' have a nip," said Dick, wiping his wet face. "That muck's for Doody and Mac."

Kin had observed several things as he sat on the fence.

"What place is Macintosh supposed to take on this run?" he demanded.

Dick turned redder.

"Head shepherd. Well; you have to give a chap like him some license, y'know. He licks the young 'uns into shape. And he's a demon to work, himself."

"Very like. I'll come in with you, Dick, an' get to my scribbles, I think. A man with his leg in a sling isn't good for much else."

Dick had prepared for Kin a glorious writing desk and a fountain pen, and a chair with a spring that tipped all ways. These were set in a window that

looked over the river to the green smudge making the Cunliffes’ garden; and Kin. went in, locking doors behind him; tumbled a litter of papers on the floor; found the only chewed pen handle that would write a word, and went to his work in a clean joy that was half prayer. For it was this that lay in his brain now which would come forth to stand him on his feet before all men, and to give him back the liberty that Haddington held.

Dick came to call him for lunch.

“I’ll take you down to the township this afternoon,” he said. “Got to go for more dip. What? Macintosh takes charge. Hang it, man, d’you think I keep dogs to bark myself?”

“All serene! I’ll come in a day or two, Dick. I want a loaf round the pubs for an hour—just to get back the taste of some things. But not yet; not yet.”

His shoulders stooped to the desk again, and Dick swung the door uncertainly.

“Come to lunch now, anyhow; and we’ll have tea with the Cunliffes. You have got to thank Jo——”

“I haven’t. An’ I’m not going there. Don’t know how to talk to women—never did. An’ I don’t want any lunch. Go away, Dick; I’ve got something better here.”

“But you’ll come to the township——”

“Tell you I won’t. Oh, go away, Dickie, before I get rude. I’ll come out an’ apologise later on.”

But Dick brought him to dinner by main force, and growled unavailingly when he escaped from coffee with the promptness of a rat from a snare.

“He’ll go on till he’s sick. Then he’ll come out with bags under his eyes, and a devil of a temper. I saw him like it once in Sydney.”

“Rather him than me,” said Doody. “Yes; for

the result, too. I wouldn't be proud of the rot he writes."

This was a lie, and he knew it. And Kin, who had read Doody upside down and inside out in a couple of days, would have known it too if he had troubled to think.

But there was just one thing in the world to him now. It made him crazy with the joy of it. For the strength that had charged the story of Laleefa had come back, holding out power with both hands. It was the rapid mighty fulfilment of that which had been drawing together in soul and brain through the years that he did not speak of. And it was good. He knew with the belief that is beyond assertion that it was good.

In from Rockhampton—the which is the City of Sin, Sweat, and Sorrow—stands a bush township where Kin had once lain two months, mad and half blind with sandy blight. It held part of the days that had all but swamped him, and he put it on paper for the hate and laughter of men in a stern and unerring justice. It was all there: the hot brazen evenings when men and women and half-clad children flocked the streets, and the crowded bars reeked with kerosine smoke and stale beer, the rollicking nights when Cobb's coach came in with the mails, and men of all degrees drew together, to drink because the post-office had forgotten their names years back, or to drink deeper yet because of letters which they thrust inside their shirts in silence; and the waste of desert beyond, where the empty mirage called men to their death, and the dingos bred in the rock hollows. There was a boy who had helped Kin through with those days, a boy with a handsome sullen face, as Kin had seen it often in the hotel bars, a boy who was husband and father, and utterly hopeless of the future before

he was twenty. It was the bitterest, nakedest tragedy under God’s sun. But it was good copy. Kin set it all down, purring in content, and unashamed.

He took his meals when nature grew emphatic, and his sleep when it came to him. He smoked incessant pipes, lighting them with little paper spills; and said unkind things to Dick when he invaded the temple. Reality was more real in the black and white scratches than when he had seen it with his own raw eyes. Lies became truth when he so willed it, and truth something more potent and heady than old wine. He made men. They stood on their feet, and lived. And Kin lived with them, disliking those other men who came to his door constantly to babble of meal times.

Something began to string red-hot wires up his back, and round into his eyes, and he knew that this meant payment in due season. But for three days and nights he worked unrestfully, and the call which stopped him came from outside.

It was a calm black night, with the snap of frost on the earth, and everything slept but the sea on the distant rocks. Then the clash of hoofs broke into the silence, thundering across the bridge, scattering the gravel of the road, and beating like a startled pulse on the turf beneath the end window. The sound passed on to the stable, and stopped; and Kin, who had gone to bed for the first time in thirty-three hours, took a candle and sought explanation. On the verandah he ran foul of another pyjamaed and slippersed thing which proved to be Doody in haste. They made to the stable, breathless and wordless; and it was Kin who caught Dick’s horse by the head, and pressed his hand to the still warm saddle; for Doody was pulling a limp shape upright, and imploring it to stand on its feet.

"Dead?" asked Kin, and flashed the candlelight over the puffy face. "Dead drunk," he added, and looked at Doody.

The boy's young face was shamed and drawn.

"He—he's a grand old chap when he's not like this," he said.

"Oh! It's an old game, then. How often? Every night, eh?"

"Only Saturdays—till to-night. Dick, it's time you went to bed, old man. Dick! Wake up."

"Fool," said Kin, in all the contempt of a man who has not fought a like temptation.

Doody flashed wrath up at him.

"It's your fault. Yours! And that's all you can say! Come along to bed, Dick—that's right—hang on, old chap."

"My fault?" Kin got his arm round the stuttering Dick, and bore him houseward easily. "We'll clear that up directly, if you please. And now—what is his usual method of going to bed?"

He was shivering before they had the snoring man between the blankets; but he marched Doody straight to the billiard room, and switched on the light.

"Now then," he said.

He looked big and ugly in the strong glare. His cheeks were unshaven, and the bags Dick had predicted showed under the deep-set eyes. But Doody, with the soft pink face like a girl's, stood up to him unflinchingly.

"You've seen him in Samoa and Sydney, so you know that the poor old chap can't help it."

"That's his business. Well?"

"And you know he thinks more of you than of any man living. He was off his head with pride because you were coming down. You could do what you liked with him. And you just think of your confounded

self. He’s done this because he’s disappointed that—that he’s nothing to you. I know. I’ve seen it coming on. There! Have you had enough?”

“Not quite. You’ve got nerve, Doody. What do you want me to do?”

“Let him look after you a bit. He—loves you,” said the boy, who knew all that this may mean to the man who did not.

Kin yawned openly.

“Well—you’ve told me what you think, an’ I haven’t told you what I think. So that ends it. Now I’m goin’ to bed. Good-night.”

“You—you’ll see what you can do, please, Severne?”

“You mind your own business,” said Kin, and disappeared with the guttering candle.

CHAPTER X

WHICH DOES NOT EXPLAIN HOW MUCH DUTY A MAN OWES TO HIS KIND

KIN, having raged through five wild hours of neuralgia, came to breakfast with the intent to speak some truths to Dick. But Dick's florid skin and blue eyes were clear and untroubled, and the damp fair hair on his forehead asserted sea bathing aforesaid.

"Lazy beggar," he said serenely; "why didn't you come bathing with Doody and me? Oh, your leg? Forgot that. Well; you're not too lame for riding, Kin? We're bringing in cattle from behind Blue Spur to-day."

Kin considered himself insulted and aggrieved. There were Doody's puffed eyelids to show that they, too, bore the burden that lay to Dick's charge.

"Think not," he said, avoiding Doody's eyes. "I'm rather keen on writing, thanks."

But when he went to his rooms the old pain and want of grip fell on him, driving him restlessly up and down, until fear caught him by the shoulders and turned him out to find Dick.

"I'm just a bit stale," he told himself, once and again. "Dick's switched me on to a side track, the beggar. But I'll get back to-morrow. I'll be all right to-morrow."

Being an honest man, he was angry at Doody's quick-muttered gratitude when their horses brushed stirrups at the stable gate.

"I'm comin' because I can't write. But Dick—how does he manage it?"

"I don't know. He never shows it, 'cept that he loses his hold of things, somehow. That's why Macintosh——"

"Macintosh! Ah! He's boss here, Doody."

"We'd all go to pieces without him," said Doody. "He's the best kind we breed, is old Mac."

Kin believed it at sight of the two men ahead. Dick was solid and square as a flour sack, but the raw-boned chestnut alongside carried a raw-boned man who marked himself ruler by the very swing of his shoulders.

The worth of Dick's horses was known from the Bluff away north to Timaru, and Dick never spared them. He swept his team across grass land where the cut sods were slung far behind, steadied an ace at the bridge approach, and passed the planking at a slapping trot. On the cutting beyond dusty manuka scrub fought with shiny-leaved kowhai, and baby waterfalls made the under-way greasy. But Dick led the pace with loose rein, giving breathing time only on the top of the world where the sweet air washed round them from unhandled ranges.

Sheer down at their feet the Cunliffes' house crouched in great width of broken bush garden; behind it the river winked wicked eyes in the sun; and behind again the old grey sea bared her broad breast to the white-winged gulls.

There was no suspicion that there had ever been sound here since the beginning of things until Josephine came out of the house with a basket of clothes and began to pin them on a glittering line. Then Doody's low clear call sank down from the height, and she looked up, waving a towel.

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"Come over to-night—all of you. Grannie's wanting some music, Dick."

"Right you are," shouted Dick, and rode on.

But in his heart Kin said: "Not for this child," and straightway forgot her in the tingling joy brought by the grip of saddle and rein.

And Doody rode with his head down, and his soft mouth sullen. Because it was quite likely that Kin would make of his lady some wild unguarded thing when he set her down in his stories for the men of the world to see.

The morning was young yet in the township, with a gang of dredge hands going out to work, trim, alert and self-respecting, and a smell of breakfast new at every corner. A long-spent old digger with the keen eye of the sportsman doddered up the street with a string of trout; and it was at Macintosh's question that Kin first learnt the name of the district J.P.; for Dick wriggled uneasily in the saddle, saying:

"Let the old beggar alone, Mac. So long as he doesn't sell to you or me, I don't want to meddle."

"He kens better than that. Na; he'll juist be sellin' cheap ta Pete——"

"Well, hang it! I can't get Pete into a row," said Dick sharply. "What d'you think Mrs. Cunliffe—by Jupiter, Doody! I'll give you something in a minute! Can't you look where you're going?"

Doody swung his bit free with a careless apology, and Dick drew rein at a new-opened bar, rapping on the door with his whip.

"Doody can't drink, and Mac won't," he said. "You're not going to be unsociable now, Kin?"

Kin gave some unorthodox answer, and his throat and his eyes went hot. For the man who came out at Dick's call was a half-caste of Maori breed, and from the round squat barrel to the shade at the finger tips

Kin knew him. To gamble with a man, to drink with him, or to love him may be to forget him; but to be broken before other men through him does not allow of forgetfulness. Kin stooped in his saddle.

"Have you got a spare room handy—one where I could see you alone for a few minutes?"

"No," said Pete sullenly, but there was just the little quiver of the eyeball to show that he understood.

"Sorry," said Kin, dismounting swiftly, "because, you see, I'll have to say what I've got to say here, then. Hold the rein, Doody."

Dick grabbed the shoulder where it loosened from the coat.

"Kin, don't be a fool. You can't do that sort of thing here. This isn't Australia back-blocks——"

"I'm goin' to smash that fellow," said Kin very distinctly; "an' if you don't let go I'll smash you too."

"You clear out, Pete—sharp. I'll settle this gentleman. Now, Kin; if you don't want all Tupara to think you're havin' D.T.'s you'll put on your coat again."

"Curse it! Why—it's no business of yours! I'm willin' to take the consequences——"

"You're not—because you don't know them—shut up, Doody. D'you think no one has any sense but yourself? See here, Kin, don't make a public row, or I'll have to run you in myself. I'm magistrate——"

A sudden remembrance of the Dick of twelve hours ago struck Kin's sense of humour. He slid into his coat, and climbed to the saddle.

"All right. I'll settle him when you're not around. Plenty of time. You'll have to go without your drink, Dick."

"I'll get one at Murphy's——"

"Then I'll go back to Pete——"

"Blest if you do! Kin, old man, I—we'll go straight on, eh?"

Doody chuckled as he put his horse to a slinging canter.

"That'll hold old Dick's head up coming home. Yes—and farther too, if Severne is generous enough."

Kin swept alongside Dick, and the wrath was gone from his face. The settlement of this could wait. But it would be no less final when it came.

A cold wind caught them on the levels behind the township, and ran with them up the hill beyond, blowing the snow-grass in great red ripples to left and right. Rough scoria and flint came next, overlaid with a savage thick thistle.

"No cattle here, I'll bet," said Dick. "Where away, d'you think, eh, Mac?"

Macintosh jerked his whip handle toward a patch of scrub and stunted birch that lay down the hill to the left.

"There'll be some theer, for sure. An' mair roon' by Deadman's Hut, maist like. They'll drive before the wind. I'll tak one o' ye, an' gang prospectin'. An' ye'll gat Tony Welsh frae his hut by the crik tae gie ye a hond gin they're ower grumphia." He dropped his keen eyes on Kin. "Ye can ride," he said; "gin ye canna mainage a whup. I'll tak ye wi' me."

Horse and man turned in one clumsy movement, pawed straight up hill, and dropped into the unknown beyond. Kin followed in an eagerness that brought him clattering beside Macintosh through thorny mic-a-mic and tripping ta-whina, with a rattle of loose shingle behind, and the sudden sulphury smell of fire struck from flint. Below lay the clay workings of a gold field long dead, and they descended into it as into a sleeping city. The sun was bright over the length of it, polishing broken pinnacle and slender minaret and

long ridged terraces into sullen gold. One rabbit sprang from a hundred-foot castle, and showed the white scut of a tail down the grassy ways. Macintosh loosed his long whip in greeting until the echo boomed tenfold through the majestic ruins; and Kin's whole senses were greedily alive to the explanations his quick questions brought.

"Ay; a gey fine gowld field in its day—fower thoosan' men, an' maybe mair. Ay; that wur the main street, wi' Sandy Pogan's bar rinnin' nicht an' day. Ye canna see much noo but the bit pavement, can ye? Weel, I'll no be sayin' but theer's gowld in't yet, forbye it's hard to come at. But the hatters dinna come here that much. They're ower feart o' the Deadman's Hut."

"Where's that?"

"We'll be tae it directly—mind the mare's legs amang they tailin's. Losh, theer's watter eneuch here yet for rinnin' a hydraulic."

They splashed through the little streams that bred delicate ferns and lush grass among the great gaunt faces, and beat up through smothering manuka scrub to a clearing rimmed in by a broken sod wall. A sod hut sat in the centre; low, squat, and tin thatched, with a rickety door that swung loose.

"That's the hut," said Macintosh; "theer's been cattle alang here this day. Gang ye canny the noo, an' we'll maybe fin' them bunched."

Kin withdrew a long stare from the hut.

"It's not much to look at. What's the story?"

"Ou; it's no juist much o' a story—weel, I'll tell't in twa-three words. Theer was a lassie—she wed wi' a mon abune her—an'—they wis no ower happy forbye. She came frae the township, an' it wis theer 'at she kenned the mon wha lived here. He wis gowld diggin'. Ay, theer's a hunner mair like huts

aroon'. Weel—ou, ay. They wis juist no friendly wi' each, the wee lassockie an' her mon—an' the ither—in the end o't she rinned awa wi' the ither. She wis juist a wee lassockie wha'd wed tae high, ye'll unnerstan'. But her mon—an' he wis a wild lad wi' an unbroke temper tae him—he socht her, ragin', an' swearin' tae kill the ane wha had ta'en her. Ane morn they fund the gowld digger shot deed on his dure step, an' the lassockie was back at her home. But she died i' the week end, an' her mon—I dinna ken. When they sockt him he wis na theer—that's a'. Ther's no blame tae the bit lass—ay; I kened her those days i' the township."

"There's no blame to her man, either," said Kin. "What's the ghost? There is one, of course. Bloody hands and wild yells, I suppose."

"Na," said Macintosh in grave dignity. "I hanna seed it, fowk say 'at ken 'at theer's a black priest walks frae th' gateway an' through the swingin' dure, an' oop tae the winner in the hinner een'. An' fowk say 'at he maks the sign o' the cross on the winner. 'At's true. I hae seed it."

"Seen what?"

"The mark on the winner forbye—dune like wi' a smudged finger. It will no rub oot—na; I'm no superstetious; but I wouldna see the sun set through that winner—no for all things, I wouldna."

Kin twisted in the saddle. He had followed upward and unheeding through the scrub, and the sod hut was humped at their feet, with a blinding flash of light struck across the little end window. Wind howled up the clefts that split all the hills to rightward, and clashed the dried raupo pods in the swampy uplands. Kin shivered, tightening the rein.

"Come on," he said, "an' let the dead bury its dead. It's a desolate place enough, Heaven knows."

"Ou, ay," said Macintosh in his throat; and they crossed the swamp shoulder to shoulder, with quick eyes lifting for the track of cattle.

But the little squat hut blinked after them cheerfully. For it foresaw the day that would bring those two within it as two men had once come there before—for the love of a woman.

The challenge of a frightened steer rang from the loose bush ahead, and Kin's mare fought the bit at the call.

"Lat her be," howled Macintosh, and swung to the right; "she'll roon' oop the last ane hersel', gin ye but sit tight an' lat her heid be."

Kin had once followed men through gum scrub and sassafrass and salt-bush, with the dust grey on his eyes, and the fierce heart of the tracker waked in him. But it was pure joy of the hunt that caught him now, so that he took the mare by the head and rammed her in among the giant birch boles, where the going was slippery with shining cast leaves like scales, and heavy with bog from the springs.

The mare lost her temper at the beginning. Then she shut her teeth inside the bit and took charge; and thereafter Kin crouched himself in the saddle, and gave her her will in a reckless delight. Golden moss and maiden-hair spun under foot. Supple-jack roped in Kin's lame ankle, and he jerked it free with a curse. Lawyer thorns wound about his neck to rasp away with a hundred thin trails of blood, and tangles of tree fern and clematis swung the chase this way and that, as a rudder swings to the sea. But the unseen crackle of racing cattle called still, and the mare answered, sweeping out to blown tussock set over with fallen logs. Against the sun rode Macintosh, a lean long-armed shape; and the medley of cattle made noise in between. The mare splashed to her stifle

in the peat of a flax swamp that was foul with still water and crisp with young ice. Steers and calves and old cows charged it after, in obedience to Macintosh's whip, and along the front the koradi sticks fell with the snap of breaking spears. The harsh wild-honey scent of them blew against Kin's face, and the great flax leaves whipped his shoulders as the mare floundered ahead full tilt.

"Roon' on them. Roon'," shouted Macintosh; and the mare's willing heart thumped louder at Kin's knee.

The cattle were bunching by twos and fives, making the low moaning that is sign of exhaustion. Men and horses steadied at the hearing; and where the clacking hoofs slowed to an amble up a tussock slope Mackintosh wheeled to Kin's side.

"They're a' richt noo. They'll gang like tired bairnies. Hoo like ye the mare? Losh! mon; she's carr'in' the bit ootside of her teeth."

"I know. I'll get it in now—if she'll let me. By Jupiter," said Kin with enthusiasm, "I haven't had such a clinking ride for five years, Macintosh. Dick doesn't keep any slouch of horses on his run."

"Nor o' freens either, I'm thinkin'"; Mackintosh looked at him keenly. "Ye are lame, an' ye're scratchit wi' thorns, an' stinkin' wi' swamp watter—an' ye're grinnin' like a schule-boy, forbye. Ye are come tae leeve i' the Back-Country, eh?"

"No," said Kin; "I belong to Sydney—and the streets. Is that the township down there?"

"Ay. We hae come away roon'—it's the receivin' paddock lies juist below—we'll be fillin' it afore the boss comes wi' his lot; an' a guid thirthy heid we hae, too, for the fillin'. We'll juist wimple them doon circumspect."

On the flat Dick and Doody tailed a small mob to meet them, and Macintosh looked sideways at Kin.

"Ye'll tak the boss straight hame—an' mak a wee contrac' wi' him, maybe?"

"What sort of contract?"

"It wud be fine tae ploy yer meetin' wi' Pete aff agin' his drinkin'. Ou, ay; I ken the boss. A douce lad when he's sober, an' willin' tae dae richt. But he'll need all the helpin' ye can gie tae sauve him."

Kin grunted.

"I don't make promises till I've looked at the head an' tail of 'em," he said, "Hallo, Dick! We beat you bad with our lot, old man."

Kin whipped Dick home with his thirst unslaked, then turned restive.

"No; I'm not goin' to the Cunliffes. I've done enough for one day. Now I'm goin' to write. You two can say I'm ill or dead or something. An' we'll fix up that little business about Pete in the morning, Dick."

Ten minutes later he wandered into the smoking room, and heard two sentences from the hall beyond.

"You're not going to tell him Josephine's secrets. I'll be d—d if you shall! You can tell him your own silly secrets——"

"Thanks awfully. I'll clump you over the head next time you swear at me, Doody. And how d'you make out it's Jo's secret, when she don't know one word about it?"

Kin removed himself by way of the farthest window, and went to the red room that watched the bridge. But he did not work. He leaned out of the window, and watched the bridge, too, where the thickening night came up out of the black gorge behind it.

The creak of the saddle that day troubled him with new longing, and the smell of the hair where it lay wet on the mare's forequarter. For the devil of unrest was in him still, to torment him with memory

of past times that had not been altogether unbearable, even when they galled him most. The bite of a great wind sweeping over empty spaces hurt at the remembering, and he limped through his two rooms nervously, until the bridge and the trellised roses round the window were one blackness. Then a snuffing muzzle was laid on his knee, and he stooped to scratch the head of Dick's plethoric fox-terrier.

"We are tied by the leg, Mr. Tubbs," he said—"by the leg. We can't go and say 'How do you do' to Pete until we find out in how far Macintosh's suggestion was the suggestion of an impertinent fool. So that must wait. An' we can't go on the trail again until we've done with Haddington. So that must wait. An' we must be very very careful of ourselves, for we can't write anything but piffle when the red-hot knitting needles come into our heads. And that won't wait. So what are we going to do? The pin has been pulled out of the crank, Mr. Tubbs, and it takes very little to put us badly out of gear at present. But we'll go on writing, sir; and we'll pray exceeding humbly that the machinery will keep in some sort of working order. For there's going to be an evil time for this child if it doesn't."

CHAPTER XI

“THERE ARE TOO MANY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS WORLD”

“LOOK! Isn’t it glorious? I stole it from Dick’s pet tree near the library—just been getting a book, you know. Doesn’t it make you think of Australia?”

Kin glanced up. Josephine’s eyes laughed out from the shade of the blue sunbonnet, and the sprig of seeded wattle that she tossed on his undried words was no more abashed than she.

“Doesn’t it? I had to stop and say ‘Good morning,’ you know. You did look so dreadfully solemn. You never saw me go by just now, did you?”

“No,” said Kin, handling the crimson seed tenderly. If sight or touch of wattle does not flood the heart of an Australian, it is probable that he was born in Russia or Hongkong.

“I watched you for ever so long,” said Josephine frankly. “May I sit on the window sill? Thanks. Why haven’t you been over to see us? You’re not lame still, are you?”

“I—I don’t know. I’ve been writing these two days——”

“Have you? I hope your stories agree better with the reader than they appear to do with the writer, then.”

Kin’s eyes dropped again to his desk. He lined out a word, and in replacing it remembered.

“Oh—yes—thanks very much,” he said vaguely.

“You needn’t,” said Josephine, with a little breeze

of laughter. "You never heard a word that I said—you know you didn't. And you don't look a bit fit to write. Put it up, and come over to lunch. Dick's starving you here, I'm quite sure."

Kin pressed his hands over his eyes in a sudden weakness.

"I must write," he said.

Then Josephine understood the full value of that compassion which had called a halt in her.

"Well; you'd write much better after some fresh air. Do come."

Kin made no answer, and Josephine flipped the pages of her book with quick fingers. Doody would have recognised the sign of nervousness. Kin saw only the leaves as they spun. He sprang up, and his hand gripped on the cover where she held it.

"Give that to me—at once. What are you thinking of? Where did you get it?"

Josephine did not move; but the very stillness of her voice was dangerous.

"You will give me that book back, please. Do you hear? I got it to read. You needn't think I stopped here because I wanted to talk to you. I would much sooner read that book than talk to you."

"I hope not," said Kin, throwing it on a chair behind him. "It's a translation of 'Le Ventre de Paris.' Did you know?"

"Do you think I pick my books with my eyes shut? Give it back, I tell you. It has nothing to do with you what I choose to read. You have read it, I suppose?"

"That's very different. You are a woman."

"Oh! I'm tired of that! Doody says it when I want to dive from the Black Point, and Dick says it when I want to go camping. Everybody says it when they don't want me to do what they do. It is just selfishness."

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“It’s nothing of the kind,” said Kin, roused. “It is—it is—protection.”

“Well? You protect a thing for home consumption, don’t you? I learnt that from Dick. You protect it entirely for use among yourselves. Well, that’s selfishness, isn’t it?”

Kin had never attempted to protect a thing for other than home consumption in all his days; but the aloofness of the girl face stung him to earnestness.

“I think there is no selfishness in shielding a woman from some of the evil the world has to show.”

“Zola tells about a lot of good, too. Dick said so the other day. So I climbed up five shelves to get this—and they were dusty—horrid! Dick never lets the housemaid into the library. And I made my dress so dirty—look! Now, give me that book back, if you please.”

“I’m sorry,” said Kin untruthfully; “but I can’t.”

Josephine rose up in all her slim dignity, and her eyes were levelly on him.

“You are the most impertinent man I ever met. I shall never speak to you again.”

““Le Ventre de Paris,”” said Kin, “is the dirtiest bit of writing Zola ever did. An’ his stuff isn’t meat for women at any time. Now, if you want it back I will give it to you.”

Josephine turned scarlet.

“You’re horrid! Oh, you are horrid! Of course, I don’t want the thing. It’s only—you are so stupid! What did you dare me for? I—and you’ve made me give in now. I never give in.”

“Neither do I,” said Kin. Then they looked at each other and laughed.

“As Protection means so very much to you,” said Josephine demurely, “I am sure you’ll come back with me when I tell you Dick and Doody are bringing cattle

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over the bridge this morning, and—and—I don't want to meet them by myself."

Josephine had nearly as much fear of cattle as Macintosh himself. But there is more than one kind of truth. Kin hesitated; thumbed his papers regretfully; finally gave in, and went with her.

"Just to your gate, I think. I must get on with my work, you know——" The sunshine was back on Josephine's face, but she looked at him half wistfully.

"Your writing means a great deal to you, Dick says."

"It is everything. Some day it will be more still. Then I'll go for a walk around the earth with it, and there will be no one to interfere."

Josephine read personal suggestion into this; but Kin thought of his bond with Haddington.

"Dick brings all your stories over to us," she said deliberately. "You copy Zola, don't you? I wonder if Dick will put your books up five shelves—when they are written."

Kin retaliated swiftly, according to his rule.

"You won't dirty more than your dress in getting them, anyway. And you haven't read Zola, have you? A man would be more just."

"A woman can get more result out of fractions than lots of men do out of numerals," said Josephine. "All the world knows that."

"And it only proves that a woman is no good at arithmetic."

Josephine pushed by her bonnet, and the set of her head showed wrath. Then she leaned on the bridge-end, and laughed.

"You're not a bit like Doody or Dick. Not a bit. There's no use getting angry with you. But I don't like your stories. There are so many other things you could write about——"

"What things?"

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“Oh—the sun on the sea—and the way the birds play with each other—and the wind when it’s blowing ever so light on the hills—and the scent of the flowers and the flax—and all the music everywhere—and the—the glory of it all.”

Kin was watching her keenly. The glory was on her own glad eyes, and her parted lips, and wide-flung hands.

“What couldn’t I do if I could see your side of it too,” he said under breath. Then: “My things are as true as yours. They are life.”

“I don’t quite understand that,” said Josephine simply. “There are flowers and music and things everywhere, aren’t there? But you haven’t got any in your stories. They hurt. And when your people love each other, it is all hard and unhappy. And love isn’t a bit unhappy. I love everybody, and so I know.”

It was the canted gate of Josephine’s home that blocked them. Kin dragged it open absently, and followed her through. Her speech was blank heresy to him yet, and he would be angry when he had tracked her meaning to its fulness. But just now he walked in silence under the great red birches, and through the tangled garden, and across the low concrete verandah to the very door itself.

The door gaped from a wide dark hall that ran into a distance filled with sound. Josephine cast her bonnet on the ground.

“That’s Honi! Hear him calling, the darling! Jim must be up from the township. Wait till I show him to you.”

She sped down the hall hot-foot, and a door to Kin’s right burst open.

“Josie, I’ll lay the rough ov me tongue on tu ye in a minyut! What wid yer butes on me clane flure—Arrah! it’s yersilf, is ut? Stan’ off from me, thin, ye

gossoon. I'll tache ye tu putt yer arms round a dacint wumman's waist, an' why shouldn't ye then? Will ye stan' off from me?"

"I won't promise—if you put that broom down," said Kin, grinning.

"Dad, then, ye're ahl ov the spalpeen I thought ye. Git along wid ye, an' me hot wather goin' cold on me wid yer nonsinse. Josie, avic, where are ye? Josie! Ah! weary on ye for woman, Josie, are ye gone deaf? An' me cahlin' ye wid every bone in me body."

Josephine danced up the hall, and there was a brown two-year-old on her shoulder, with both plump hands shut in her bright tumbled hair.

"I thought I heard a smothered sound somewhere, Katty, dear. What's the matter? Oh! I remember. You came up in the coach with her, Mr. Severne. But you mustn't mind all Katty says, you know. She's a dreadful flirt. Ask Doody."

Katty's wrinkled hands shook on the pail and broom, and the whole fat shape of her heaved.

"Bedad, Josie, the beat ov yersilf is not in the counthry. I niver did ut, then. I did not. Misther Doody knows betther. Sure's death I tuk the dish-cloth tu him when he was afther me wid the mistletoe. An' ut's the dish wather I'd take tu ye, me foine bhoy—holy horror! Here's the misthress!"

The door slammed behind her, and the brown solemn ball on Josephine's arm lifted a thumb from her hair to point it at Kin.

"What's that?" he asked slowly.

"Ask him," said Josephine mischievously. "I'm not quite sure, Honi, my pet. Grannie, this is Mr. Severne; and if you'll take him into the dining room while I get some gooseberry wine——"

"Please don't," said Kin in alarm. "I—I must go. I—I only meant to come to the gate."

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He was giddy with weariness, and irritated with the thought that Josephine had roused in him. Besides, the sight of this woman unsteadied him, for it brought back, in a great blinding flash of memory, the figure and manner of Père Eugène. The likeness was there, in the lean black-draped length of her, and in the biding stillness of the white face. But it passed at her speech, for Père Eugène's voice told the wide love for mankind which is the crown of soul anguish overcome. This woman wore no such crown.

"But she's had the suffering," said Kin, getting himself away in haste. "Plenty, I should judge. An' she's hard as rocks. Where's the likeness, then? For Père Eugène's mouth could look like that girl's when she was cuddlin' the baby. Must be the suggestion of self-repression——"

"The kye are comin' hame," called Josephine from the step. "Hear them! Dick is in a hurry, I should fancy."

Kin dragged the gate to slowly, staring back at her where she stood slim and upright in the sunlight, with both arms upheld to the child on her shoulder, and the laughter flash of white teeth showing in each. She struck the ringing top note of glad young life, and he turned away abruptly.

"What business is it of hers if I don't put music and bread—and—milk in my writings?" he said.

Then he climbed the bridge abutment, lit his pipe, and watched the charge come up with Dick in the forefront. Dick had been away since daybreak, and he had found more than cattle. Kin saw it when he cast himself from the saddle, and slung the rein on his arm.

"Doody and Welsh can take 'em home. I'm sick of 'em, the brutes. An' I've a throat like a lime-kiln—horroosh, Kin, old boy. What you lookin' so glum over,

eh? Been playin' with Josie? Oh, you're a little bit of all right, you are."

After the wild scents of the garden and the clearness of Josephine's eyes, Dick's flushed face and tainted breath came unpleasantly, and Kin did not hide his disgust.

"Better get into the saddle again, I think. Your own legs ain't steady enough just now. You're drunk, Dick; you composite fool."

Dick was sufficiently sober and bellicose to pound nine men out of ten that instant. But Kin was the tenth man always to him.

"I'm sorry," he whimpered. "It—it was a tough bit of work, Kin, and—and I got so dry. You'd have done it yourself."

Kin remembered day-long marches through salt bush and mica plain with a reeking township struck at the dusk. And he remembered a true word spoken by Père Eugène.

". . . That the weak may serve the strong? That is a looking-glass version. God wrote it otherwise."

"The other way is untenable, father," he had said positively. Now, he stood on the bridge planking with the roar of water under his feet, and looked at the man before him.

Dick twisted his hand in the rein, and kicked his toes sullenly. No other man in the world could make a whipped cur of him. But then, he loved no other man.

"You don't care about me at all," he said. "You promised to ask me why I didn't want you to smash Pete, an' I waited all yesterday, but you were writing, and you forgot. You don't care for anything but your writing, Kin."

It was the plaint of a lonely child. But the pitiful side of Kin slept yet.

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“Well, I certainly won’t ask you now. You’d best come on home—if you can.”

The gay crack of Doody’s whip sounded across the water, mixed with the clatter of hoofs and the far-sent rumble of Gaelic speech which meant Macintosh working his dogs.

“Suppose I’d better—you’re so unkind, Kin—I wouldn’t l-look at you that way—never care ’bout me at all.”

Kin helped him into the saddle, and took him home in silence. Then he sought Doody. Doody was sluicing a half-day’s dust from his face and neck, and he brought a dripping head out of the basin to answer Kin.

“Gone to bed, has he? He’ll be all right by dinner. Well, what’s the trouble? You don’t care, I suppose.”

“Why doesn’t Dick want me to have a row with Pete?” demanded Kin, putting aside Doody’s young anger.

Doody turned redder than the rubbing of a hard towel warranted. Then he straightened as though under a weight.

“He’s magistrate, for one thing, and he hates unpleasantness. Then—Pete is a brute, and—if you tread on his tail you don’t know who he may bite.”

“I’d chance his biting me. The rest of Creation can look after itself.”

“It can’t. There are—Josie and Mrs. Cunliffe. We keep in with Pete because of them. You might as well know so much, for you’ll probably see Pete at their place.”

“Will I? Why? They don’t look the sort of folk to cotton to Pete.”

“I don’t mean to tell you why, and Dick won’t either. Josie doesn’t know, and you might blab, for all I can say.”

“I might. You have some nerve, kid, as I remarked

once before. But I don't want to know. Only, I think you're expectin' too much when you ask me to shake hands with a chap who tried to hang me and drown me, because of two women whom I don't know, nor want to."

"All right," said Doody, turning on his heel. "Your alphabet begins an' ends with a capital I. Josie and I knew that long ago. I'd like to change, please, if you'd get out of this."

Doody was near more than a tongue-lashing that hour. Kin came three steps with his hands shut up. Then, because Doody did not blench, he put them back in his pockets, saying shortly:

"You can keep your opinions till they're asked for next time, Doody."

He went back to his rooms, with the face of Père Eugène before him. Mr. Tubbs came, too, to sit on a low chair and dribble; and Kin spoke to him over his half-lit pipe.

"There are too many responsibilities in this world, Mr. Tubbs. It was better on the track, where nobody asked you your business or your last name. I'll finish my book an' get out of this quick, Mr. Tubbs. I don't like responsibilities. An'—what the dickens did she mean by saying that I left a lot out of my stories? I know more than she ever will. An' now, we'll get to work."

The wattle lay on the desk where Josephine had flung it three hours since. It had smudged the words, and Kin cast it out of the window impatiently. Then he read from the head of the chapter, with the sting of Josephine's speech to guide him. The whole was nakedly bitter and strong: brought home in a clean-cut cruelty that hurt. It was the life that men make and live. But there was none of God's sunlight in it. Kin pushed the sheets aside, and picked up his pen.

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“Ne’er mind, Mr. Tubbs. We’ll write what we can, sir; an’ the stags will come to the saltlick, if it is too harsh for the hinds. For women take their salt in tears, Mr. Tubbs. But we rub ours into our cuts.”

It was full seven o’clock of the following morning when Dick came to him, blew out the lamp, and called him names. Kin looked up, half-blind, with his hand still moving.

“Go away,” he said. “You’re not in this. Go away; I can’t assimilate you.”

Dick had seen Kin like this once before. He went and returned swiftly with brandy and a siphon.

“Here’s some fizz. Drink it up, and begin to think about breakfast. Here, old chap.”

Kin gulped it, roaming the room with knees that shook under him.

“Irritated exhaustion,” muttered Dick, watching. “This confounded story writing is takin’ the very life out of him. Come along to breakfast, Kin. You’ve done a good twelve hours’ work, I should reckon.”

“Work! Yes! An’ a man has reason to thank God that he can work, hasn’t he? He must put his soul into everything he writes, or he knows it won’t last. An’ then he must chuck it down and stand by while all the fools of the earth mumble over it—and leave it. They put their finger on this place and that, and damn them; and they don’t know that they are seeing a man’s soul baring itself in the market place for the sake of his art; and they don’t care. That’s what it means to write! It’s worth it, isn’t it? It’s worth it!”

Of course it’s worth it,” said Dick, his puffy face startled. “You’re the cleverest chap in the world, Kin, and everybody will know it some day.”

Kin laughed.

“Give me credit for a little sense of humour. My work is all this world and the next to me, and it won’t

weigh against a penny loaf with the People of all the Earth. Do you think I don't know it? But that doesn't matter," said Kin, sitting down and dropping his head in his hands. "I'm goin' to live my life my own way, Dick. An' if it isn't as easy as some, I don't ask any help; an' if it isn't as clean as some, I don't ask any mercy. But it's mine, and it doesn't interfere with anybody else's—an' nobody shall interfere with it. Do you understand, Dick?"

"No," said Dick, "I don't. But I suppose you're right, old chap, and I don't want to interfere with you so long as you don't knock yourself up. I—I'm awfully proud of you, Kin, you know."

Kin sat still for three long minutes. Then he came over, and put his arm about the other man's shoulders.

"I've been talking through my hat, Dickie. Now I'm goin' to talk sense. I'll be here two months longer—p'raps more, if I can't get my work off my chest before. Well; if you'll sit tight an' not play up while I'm here, I'll guarantee not to call on Pete. How will that stand?"

"W-wait a minute," said Dick nervously. "Let me think."

Doody had finished his breakfast and gone when they two came to the table. Dick rang for fresh tea, and poured it out.

"We'll drink to our contract," he said. "An'—an' we're going to be good friends always, ain't we, Kin?"

"Of course," said Kin carelessly, and yawned.

But because Kin must needs reverence the highest—when he could find it—no lesser man than Père Eugène might come into his heart to stay there.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD DAYS AND EVIL

"MAIL BAG," proclaimed Doody, clattering into the dining room. "Three circulars and a regular bilious attack for you, Dick. And some papers and letters for you, Kin."

Kin turned them over, propped Haddington's against the toast-rack, and read it while he finished his breakfast. It conveyed in language suave as Haddington himself the suggestion that Kin was idling the hours, unheeding of the payment which was surely falling due, and hinted that a continuance of short stories would be desirable for the keeping of his name before the public. It said several very nasty things in delicate speech, and Kin's lips caught the sneer as he looked up at Dick's tenth question.

"Yes; Haddington. Politeful as usual. He's gettin' scared that I won't come back again. He has," said Kin reflectively, "he has a large idea of moral obligations. Well; I don't mean to disappoint him. I'm goin' back next month. An' as I've given my sworn word to go over to the Cunliffes to-night, Dickie, you needn't interrupt me till it's time to get into a boiled rag; for you'll get clumped if you do."

Kin was writing doggedly these days, with the old pain back in his shoulder and head, and the trouble of wakeful nights to goad him. Through his life he had looked for this time; and it had come, according to unbroken custom, with the give in one hand and the take in the other. Rank pride and joy in his work had gone

before the fierce struggle to keep up the steady output, and haphazard hours with Josephine on the bridge or down by the sea had sent him back to his work with a growing ache of dissatisfaction. For she and Doody knew of the things which can make Heaven out of a man and a maid and a mud hut; and though Kin, standing on the outside, could make a very efficient Purgatory and a first-class Hell, he began to desire to make the other things too. But he came to the learning slowly and uncertainly, gaining little at first but hate from Doody. For Doody understood that a serpent had come into his Eden which was too big to knock on the head, and too cunning to wile away with blandishments, and he feared it accordingly.

Dick had asked him one day what he thought of Kin, and Doody, intent on the splicing of a whip handle, answered guardedly:

“I don’t know.”

“You never say that unless you are cock-sure of a thing.” Dick was suspicious instantly. “What do you think of him? Out with it?”

“I don’t know any more of him than he wants me to know—and you don’t either. But he knows as much of us as he wants to. And he can find out more when he likes. I’ve got no tickets on sitting at the big end of a telescope when he’s at the sight. And—he means to stay there.”

Dick drew a long breath.

“He has earned the right to be there. We haven’t. I don’t in the least know what his limitations are—if he has any; but he’s going to do something big. Big! And I don’t know him. He must have been through the mill before ever I saw him. But he doesn’t talk about it.”

“He doesn’t care a tinker’s benediction about a living soul,” said Doody sharply. “He’ll put anything he can find into his hash pot, the cormorant——”

“Yes; I don’t think his world has been run on ethical lines, somehow. He—he’s a bit hard. A fellow needs someone to—to care what he does with his life, y’know. If old Kin had a mother——”

Then he fled from the derision of his junior, whose own mother had a map of New Zealand on her bedroom wall with a pin stuck through the place where Dick’s station should be, that she might see it and play to it each night before she slept.

Through the black nights or the moonlight nights, when the surf thundered eternally and the wekas called across the swamps, Kin got to the heart of his story again, rejoicing in the sordidness that was so very real. He had searched in deep places for the right to tell of these things. He had seen the same game played out, and he had played it himself in the grim recklessness of necessity. But under the day, with the suspicion of a higher knowledge troubling him, hand and brain weakened, and he wrote what he wrote without that unerring belief in himself which alone can make a man’s work hold.

His window flared across the flats and the river, and beyond, when the morning was cleared of the dawn-fog, a blue sunbonnet bobbed daily in the raupo rushes where Josephine’s eel nets were set. Once the bonnet was late, and he could do no work until it came. The discovery of this angered him, and he straightway dragged his desk to a corner that faced to the bridge and a quiet home paddock where mares fed with their foals. Then he drove on with his writing savagely; forgetting all things but the knowledge that this must be done and out of hand very soon if he was to gain his place before Haddington called time. For the flotsam that lay in the wash of Australasian papers would make him no name beyond his own land.

It was these things that went with him over the river

to sit at his side on the long verandah, that crawled with shadows of the treetops answering to the night wind. The lamplight from the hall fell across Josephine's vivid young head; and beyond her, and beyond the trailing creepers, the rugged gorge whitened and softened under the moon touch. Down in the sedge an army of frogs chug-chugged like a broken-winded gunboat, and the boom of the long sea rollers beat up through the dark unceasingly. Dick, making a little cairn of stones to bury his burnt matches, babbled to the grey woman on the upright chair of ensilage and unsown crops, and one bittern was talking to the wind in the flax. But Josephine's gay voice took the sorrow even from the sea call; and Kin soaked himself in the present hour, giving no thought to future days.

In the bare drawing room Doody was playing the piano, with a painful and painstaking accuracy that made Dick presently go in and take him by the shoulders.

"The desire for perfection is the blight of your young life, Doody. You must be content to find it in others. Get up; I'm going to sing."

Kin shivered. Drink had left one pure and lovely thing untouched in Dick, and when he chose he could take all his world by the heartstrings with it. Mrs. Cunliffe jerked her chair back stiffly; but out of the dark her clicking needles asserted the pain that bound her.

Dick coaxed the jangling notes into agreement, such as little waves make on a sandy shore. He sang, and Doody dropped on the concrete at Josephine's knee with a happy sigh. For she let him stay there.

This was an old camp song that was sung on the cutter o' nights in Samoa, and it was not good that Dick should use it again. For those days were dead and forgotten. Kin put his head against the verandah post, and shut his eyes. He had taxed body and soul very

sternly of late, and the torture which every man bears when he is groping after something that is higher and wider than he knew aforetime was on him.

Josephine stirred, and Doody put up both hands to catch hers.

"Let him sing it, Josie, please. I'm going mustering to-morrow—a whole fortnight, dear. And—I want it to remember."

So Kin heard it for the first time after Herrick's "Invocation to Anthea," and it was heady as brandy. And it was he alone who did not know that "Napoleon's Farewell" begins with six lines of strong stately tenderness, like the talk of big sea rollers to the clearing keels, and then wakes to the tense passion of wind combing through the pine trees—

"Dearer than all in life to me,
Companion of my destiny;
The only heart I ever loved,
The only lips that ever moved
My stubborn will,
My Josephine."

It came with the beat of the Pacific to meet it, and it touched in Kin a trouble without a name, without meaning, without dictionary words. He slipped his pipe in his pocket and got up unsteadily; for the grip in his throat was an actual pain.

Then a man crossed the lawn from the deeps of the broken garden, and the blood raced back through Kin's heart; for the man was Pete the half-caste.

A Maori cannot be awkward, any more than he can make his eyes oblong. Pete strolled up, smiling fatly, nodded to Mrs. Cuuliffe, and lowered his bulk into a deck chair with a grunt. Doody caught his breath, for Kin was standing at tension, and none knew what might be if that tension should snap. It was Josephine who

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saw all in an eye blink, and laughed, rolling up Mrs. Cunliffe's wool ball.

"Dick, come out. We are not regarding you any longer. Grannie has finished her sock, and Pete has come, and Doody is making a cigarette. I believe he will try to smoke it directly."

"And you are doing—what?" demanded Dick, appearing in haste.

"Nothing. Grannie won't let me smoke."

"The woman who does not knit is laying up an over-charged old age for herself," said Mrs. Cunliffe.

Kin sat down. His guard was on again, and he could wait. He had played a waiting game his life long.

"We take tobacco or brandy to deaden thought," he said; "you take—knitting?" He blinked at the blue dulness of the needles. They were like the veins of her hands as he had seen them in lamplight.

"Since we are not allowed the other things—yes."

". . . New bonnets an' things, and a frock for Honi," ran Pete's liquid English. "When are you coming down to see them, Jo? Jin says Honi is a little god Maui in that frock, an' I tell her he looks kapai. You tell her it's all kapai. I did."

"And we always have the same opinions, don't we?"

Kin remembered Pete's laugh. It was as he had heard it the day he was broken.

"Don't we? A koia! Ah, kohine, you know; you know. If I said the tangata's hair was black, you would say 'he ano ma'; you would."

Josephine kept her eyes from Kin.

"If you said you were black I wouldn't say you were white. Truly I wouldn't. Do say it, Pete. It would be glorious to agree for once."

Pete's laugh rang awry this time. Doody murmured a little jubilate to his cigarette. But Mrs. Cunliffe stood up, gaunt in her long black gown, with her needles

rattling in the fingers, that Kin could swear were rattling too.

“Josephine! Josephine! You are mad! You—you—Pete—remember that she does not know—she does not know—anything. You will not mind—Pete——”

Kin shifted a little, and made two mental notes.

“He’s got the pull on that woman all right.” And again, “He was worth stripping for once. That sleeve’s too round for muscle now, and his eyes ain’t steady. But my word only holds till you break yours, Dick, my friend.”

“Jo can say what she likes. I don’t mind, bless you,” said Pete; and Dick’s heavy voice trampled the tension back into flatness of common talk.

Kin chewed the cud of silence on the homeward march. At the paddock gate he stayed his feet, for light flickered still from the men’s whare on the slope.

“I’m goin’ up to have a yarn,” he said curtly. “Good night, you two.”

It was the old hankering for the fleshpots that caught him again and again, driving him out from the fatness provided by Dick; for the taste of the life of unshackled speech and deed clings in the mouth of the men who love it. He was known in the whare these many nights past; and the boys took him among them as they never will take an outsider. His work brought him sometimes, with answers to find. Doubt brought him again, to deride the softness bred by Josephine’s words, and to get back the old grasp through the smell and the touch and the sight of men in the rough.

The whare was blind with smoke, and steaming with half-dried clothes. For the rabbiters were in from the hills where a mist had moved all the day. Hiley Brown had a kerosene-box before the fire, and an accordion;

and the cook sang solemnly over his pot washing. But Casser held the long uncleared table by force of his voice, and the tale that he told; and the ten men down the length of it cast questions unheeded against him. Macintosh's slow burr slid into the roar as Kin annexed the other end of Hiley's box, and grinned over his pipe.

"Ye hae said eneuch o' that, Casser. It wur all dune wi' years agane. Lat the deid rest, mon."

Casser's raw lumpish boyhood showed fear yet, and he hugged his mate's shoulder uneasily.

"S'welp me, I on'y wish they would rest. But—but—I seed it. Tell 'em, Bert."

"Puh! 'Tain't nuthin'. Yer allers seein' things, Casser. Well—but a dawg looks big as a efferlunt in that mist. Yes; I've seed 'em look big as a man, time an' often."

"What did you see?"

Kin's voice cut direct through the raffle of talk, and Casser answered it.

"On'y that blanky old priest walkin' in Deadman's whare. An' when I come up the hill that there cross was standin' out o' the winder like it was fresh drawn in blood. I ain't comin' home that cut to the township no more."

"I thought you'd comed 'ome by the township," said Bennett. "I seen the cross that away too, Casser. It's just a flaw in the glass."

"An' the priest's another flaw, too, I seepose? You put yer head in a bag, Bennett. But I wish that gell had choosed a feller what wasn't on our run——"

"I telt ye there was mair nor eneuch o' this, Casser; an' I telt ye all pairties wur deid. Wull ye lat it be, noo, afore that I mak ye?"

Kin had watched Macintosh closely; and he read the bald life story through before the man gathered himself

for command, and stood up. Then the group broke by twos and threes, until Kin took charge of the whole, welding it into one eager silence with the vivid truth pictures which he drew from the days that had been.

CHAPTER XIII

SUPPLE-JACK BERRIES

“GET up! Will you wake up? Severne! Man, are you dead?”

Kin slept with the whare reek still in his nostrils, and the peace of his youth on his face. But he woke wide-eyed as Doody’s hands shut on his arm.

“What is it?” he said. For the white face in the candlelight brushed wrath aside.

“Dick. He must have gone to the township after I went to bed. His horse has come back. But the saddle is cold—and I can’t find him—and I’m frightened.”

Kin got out of bed and into his trousers. And he said just one thing: “That contract is off, thank the powers.”

Then he cast on coat and boots, took the way to the stable at the double, and found Doody clutching three-fold reins.

“He—he may be on the far side of the river,” said Doody; and Kin nodded, crossing the leather at the jump. There were equal chances that Dick might be in the river.

“Make the pace,” he said shortly. And Doody made it, with Dick’s fierce little cob boring to leeward.

Down the length of the sleeping paddock, with the silent blacks of the buildings reeling behind; up the strip of metal that roared at the night as a rubbed drum roars to the sticks; across the bridge where the wash of water made sounds enough to beat all Eternity’s shores, and along the shingle foot-

way of the cutting until they caught the sickly light of the dawn stars on the hilltop. Kin's mare was reefing the bit, but Doody rode his own hack by the light pressure of his knees. Along the bush track they were racing still, for the fear of "it might be" grew with the miles cast behind, and the cold aloof silence of the dead hour between day and night was wide on the earth.

Down the steep grade to the township river Kin led by two paces, and Doody saw his shape grim against the limestone cliffs. It was charged with the intentness that marked the man always, to shut him apart from his kind when he liked. Doody was weary and over-strung, so that the silent rider became a shadow of evil that was to lead him through life into death, and beyond it. He remembered that ride in months later, and testified to the truth of this with all his soul.

"You know the fords best. Go ahead, Doody."

Doody straightened, slipping his own dread from him.

"We'd best go up and down a bit 'fore we cross," he said.

They beat through the flax and the swampy reeds, and made little lights among the willows. Kin shouted until frightened sand-pipers ran out between his feet and the wild ducks splashed screaming across the shallow bottoms. Away to leftward a couple of bitterns called with that kind of sobbing thud which is like nothing but heavy pain on the heart. Doody's breath caught in his throat with an audible choke, and Kin came through the flax bush in haste.

"Found him? Well, what is it, then? Scared?"

Doody made no answer. For the greying dawn washed into the sky, trailing thin fingers down the length of the desolate river streams and up the eternal

mountains, and the hush that was underlined by the bitterns' call came from the farthest star.

"Yes; night's the only time when you get the universe in the bulk, and then it's a bit big for one, isn't it? Ne'er mind. Come on. We'll get him directly."

They found him on the rim of the fifth stream, with his head in a puddle and his feet on a nigger-head stump. He showed neither gratitude nor brotherly love when aroused, and Kin swept Doody aside.

"Shut up, Doody. That kind of piffle's no good. See here, Dick; you stop that row and get up, or I'll souse you in the puddle again. D'you hear?"

Dick wept and raged until Kin did even as he had promised. Doody held the horses, white faced, and shaking between anger and fear.

"You brute, let him up, I tell you. Dick—oh, I've never seen him like this—what can we do—"

"Get him home, of course," said Kin sharply. "Now, Dick—"

He held Dick in the saddle with one arm about him, and jerked the reins from Doody's hand.

"Trail ahead. I can't see the track. Go on, will you?"

"Severne, you can't walk all the way. You'll get soaked, and your leg's stiff yet."

"I didn't ask you what I could do, did I? Go on, an' hold your tongue."

Kin put the fear of all things into Dick through the next mile, reducing him to speechless weeping with his face laid in the cob's main. Doody rode with his head bent under the waking day, and in the threatening darks of the bush track he shivered with more than chill. But Kin tramped in an unbroken doggedness until light caught them on the hill above Josephine's home, and the sudden glory of it made him know that he was weary. He stopped a moment,

leaning all his weight on the wither, and looked at the new thing that God was giving to the world. The sky was very far away, all delicate with daffodil and pink. But the sea was a naked gold shield that waited for the day's deeds to be graved on it. All the breaths of the pure night came over the mighty sweep of down and mountain and hill to meet the clean salt of the sea, and the scarlet of the sun's rods struck the snow of the ranges on horizon until they glowed like tempered iron. A sleepy tui rang his note from the Cunliffes' garden, and the call that answered turned Doody red to his ear roots.

"That's Josie. She's often up at daybreak. If she goes to the river she'll see us, Severne."

"Can't help that," said Kin, marching forward grimly. "We're not responsible for Dick."

Josephine's gay voice came up in scraps of song, and her print frock glinted through the trees as she ran down to the river. Doody closed up, and there was something strange in his eyes.

"For Heaven's sake don't let her see Dick," he said.

Dick was not good to look at; even Kin acknowledged that; but he spoke in irritation.

"Great Scott! What does it matter? She'll hear of this fast enough."

"She won't understand—'nless she sees. She's like Pippa. It's 'God's in His Heaven, All's right with the world' with her, always."

Kin looked at the boy through narrowed eyes.

"She'll get clear o' that idea before she's much older. What a chivalrous young ass you are, Doody. An' give me plenty o' room on the bridge, for that mare o' mine bores like a steam auger."

It was Macintosh who helped to get Dick to his room, and who helped with more than that too.

“. . . For old Dick's made up for lost time, an' no error," said Kin. "He'll have a head for a week, n' serve him well too. Where are you off to, Doody?"

"Mustering. We were to be away at daybreak. Casser and Riley turned out yet, Mac?"

"Ay; cookie wur gattin' breakfast—ye'll sleep weel the night, lad."

"Yes—it'll be a long day—you'll keep an eye on old Dick, Mac, and—and see that Severne doesn't bully him."

Kin laughed at the terminal when he took Macintosh out through his rooms.

"If I know Dick, his conscience will bully him more than ever I will. Has he been like this always, eh, Mac?"

"Whiles. It's the Co-lo-nial failin'. Ye've seed it maybe in Australyer?"

"I think! But what would you have? Man must have have some recreation, an' there's little enough up country 'sides drink."

"It's no so bad i' the toonship, ye ken. An'—it hasna touchit you."

"I've got my writing."

Macintosh looked at him under shaggy brows.

"Yer writin'? Eh, mon; an' does that fill oop yer life?"

"Yes, I suppose so.—*Yes!*" in sudden wrath at his doubt. "I don't want anythin' else, of course."

"Ye're tae be envied," said Macintosh drily. "I hanna kenned a satisfied mon befure. I'll come oop again later tae see gin the boss wants oucht. The strappin' on that cut wull likely loosen wi' sleepin'."

Kin bathed and breakfasted and went to his desk. But body and soul were exhausted, and too many things came to trouble him. Something else came also, before the lunch hour; something that swayed in

the doorway, with a bandage bisecting its eyebrow, and a tablecloth wrapped over its pyjamas.

Kin swung in his chair, and his voice was level.

"You'd better go back to bed, Dick. You don't want to get fever in that cut, do you?"

"Kin—don't be cross with me. Kin—I'm so sorry——"

"Don't apologise. I expected this."

Dick fingered the bandage uncertainly.

"You—you expect—you—you didn't trust my word. Why didn't you trust my word?"

"Why should I? You didn't trust it yourself."

"I—I tried. I did try. But Pete—he smelt of the bar, you know, and—and I had to go back with him. He waited——"

Kin moved impatiently.

"What's the good o' excusin' yourself to me? You had your fun, an' now you're payin' for it. Well, that's fair. Now, come along back to——"

"I won't.—I won't. That room's so still I can hear all sorts of noises in it. And they frighten me so."

"Shouldn't wonder. What d'you want, then? You're makin' a confounded draught with that door——"

Dick laid his head on the lintel, and wept like a scolded baby.

"I f-feel so beastly ill," he sobbed. "Doody always says 'Poor old chap' when I feel so b-beastly ill."

Kin laughed shortly.

"Does he? Well, I don't. You knew what you were in for, I s'pose? I haven't any pity for you, Dick, or for any other fool who messes up his life. I may find that I've messed up my own before long—but I'll be hanged if I ask pity."

Dick's eyes were blind with the terrors of his childhood. He stumbled down the room to bring up by Kin's chair.

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid. Kin—you're so strong—you could hold me straight. I can't help myself, Kin——"

The weak puffy face was very near to Kin's, and the loose mouth twisted pitifully.

"There's no one but you, Kin. I—I'd let you do what you liked with me. Old chap, can't you help——"

"I can't. No man can help another that way. We each dig our own graves, Dick."

"Doody says—I can't remember—but Doody and Jo don't say that. There must be something—Kin, you're so clever; you must know. You can tramp clean through temptation—you're awfully straight, Kin. If you could show me——"

"Well, I can't." Kin got his arm round the shaking shoulders. "I ain't any better than you, you poor old beggar, only my devils come in a different shape. See here, Dickie, I'll get you a nip if you're very good——"

"That's no help." Dick flung him off fiercely. "D'you think I don't know what I'm doing, Kin? I'm losin' guard on myself all round, and—and I'm frightened——" He plucked at Kin's sleeve, and his voice sank with dread. "There are some men in the township—rotten straight through—I'm goin' to be like 'em if I live—Kin, Kin you've never looked at something that you knew was going to be yourself by and by—looked and looked till you'd kill yourself to get away from it if you had the pluck."

Kin was watching with the eyes of a vivisectionist, and his breath came sharply. He knew what this was to Dick, until the knowing hurt. And he put it all away in a waistcoat pocket somewhere in his brain.

"I do know. But I can't help. It's your own game, Dick. A man's soul is required of his own

hand—not anyone else's. I kept my word last night when I'd have given a lot to wring Pete's neck. But that didn't help you. So now that arrangement is off —”

“It isn't!—It isn't! That's w-what I came to ask you. Kin, don't break your word because I broke mine. For God's own sake——”

“Get up. Haven't you any shame that you go grovelling like that!” Kin hauled Dick into his own chair, and took him by the shoulders. “Now we'll get to the bottom of this rot about Pete. You're sober enough to tell me what I want to know.”

Dick whimpered, turning his face this way and that.

“It's because of Mrs. Cunliffe. My father always tried to—to shield her from Pete, an' I took on the job. I—I never hurt anyone if I can help it——”

“Except yourself. Well?”

“So I keep in with Pete all right, and, p'r'aps I let him have a bit more license in the township than he should have. But Mrs. Cunliffe—she—she—what was it? I've forgotten.”

Kin repeated the gist of the matter patiently.

“Yes. Mrs. Cunliffe's the pluckiest woman alive. But the brute's got his knife into her, and if he's riled he'll twist it. I'd give a lot to stop that; but if you maul him I won't be able to.”

“Can't see what that's got to do with it.”

“Pete thinks too much of himself. He couldn't keep a shut mouth over it. And you bet the township wouldn't. They hate him down there. So—he'd turn the chase on to Mrs. Cunliffe, to keep 'em from tonguing after him. What? It's an old yarn, and only two or three of us know the half of it, anyhow. But Pete can rake it all out into daylight if he likes.”

Kin stood still. The notion of foregoing his own

pleasure for the sake of others was new, and it irritated him.

"I'll think about it. But first I'm going to put on a fresh bandage, and give you some sleepy medicine. You do look more than a little sick, you silly old beggar."

But when Dick had wept himself into a childish sleep, Kin went out and kicked Mr. Tubbs, who sat on the doorstep.

"That's for Dick, Mr. Tubbs—or myself; I'm not sure which. I think I'll go back to Sydney, sir. This life's too many-sided for me. But first I'll go down to the township, for Dick has spoilt my writing for the next couple of hours."

There was a ten-by-twelve store in the township, where the population bought all things from lollies to fishing rods. Sportsmen of sorts foregathered there, to sit on the counter and talk, and Kin had made one of them time and often. He soothed his soul by an hour in the stuffy room that reeked of tobacco and fish scales, slung homeward at a sharp canter, and ran foul of a brown puff-ball in one short garment and a wreath of supple-jack berries at the third stream beyond the township.

The ford narrowed to a dray track where shining water ran over shining shingle, and the child stood square in the fair-way with fat legs planted apart.

"Up!" he shouted; and Josephine's laugh came from the sedge.

"Don't you dare take him up on Lilith. Did you see Lake in the township? I'm going back in his dray? Yes; I came down with him just now."

"And he left you here?"

"No; I went down for Honi. What? Paddled, and carried Honi! And we caught a lovely trout in a back-water, didn't we, Honi? Oh, yes; poaching, of

course. But Dick doesn't mind what I do. That reminds me. How is he?"

The blue sunbonnet hung off her shoulders, and her straight print skirt was short enough to clear the bare ankles. But the frank innocence of the bright-eyed face gave Kin understanding of Doody's fears for a moment.

"Who told you about Dick?" he asked shortly.

"Lake said he wasn't well. I'm going to take him over some jelly this afternoon. Not all Dick's housekeepers and all Dick's men can make jelly so well as Grannie can."

"You can't see him this afternoon. Yes—he's broken out badly this time. I knew he would."

"Poor old Dick," said Josephine softly.

"He gets his pleasure, and then he pays for it. That's law, an' we all do the same. Can't see that he needs so much pity myself."

"He's breaking his life," cried Josephine, suddenly hot. "And you see it—and you don't care."

"I don't, particularly. Why should I? I've seen a hundred men break their lives in the same way. That's their business, I consider. Not mine."

Josephine hugged Honi closely, looking at Kin over the black head with the scarlet berries.

"Nobody's business is only their own," she said. "You've got to get into other people's lives, whether you like it or not. You've come into Dick's, you know, and you'll never get out again. He thinks more of you than of any one living, and so you can help him more, of course."

Kin's hand bore heavily on the mare's neck.

"I don't want it," he said. "I don't want folk to care for me. I don't care for anyone but my work. It's much easier to go on your own hook, and not to have to think of others. I like my life to myself."

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“Oh! No wonder you’re so narrow.”

“I’m not!”

“Oh, but you are! That’s what’s wrong with your stories, of course. You never can see any of the really beautiful things in the world while you only think of yourself.”

“If you were a man!” cried Kin, losing guard of his temper. “Doody says some pretty cheeky things, but, by Jingo, he——”

Josephine rose up from the flax clump and faced him, with a strange seriousness on her soft mouth and chin.

“You’re a strong man,” she said; “and you could do a lot of good with your life—more than many. But you don’t. If Dick thought it grieved you when he was drunk he’d try to keep sober for love of you. He is such a dear old boy when he’s right, and he’s always so ashamed—and I suppose you were hard to him, as you are to everybody and everything.”

“I think I might as well go home,” said Kin. “I’m not the only person that’s hard, to my mind. Good-bye. Lake will be along directly.”

“Good-bye—no, Honi—don’t give him those—don’t. He would never understand.”

Honi wriggled forward in Josephine’s arms, stuffing a part of his garland into Kin’s breast pocket. Kin guarded the berries, stepping back.

“What is it? Why won’t I understand? What do they mean, Honi?”

Honi lifted his big soft eyes, and his words dropped with like softness. “Aroha! Kanui aroha—what next, Josie?”

“Aroha means ‘love,’ doesn’t it? Why would I never understand?”

Kin’s lids were drooped over his keen eyes, and Josephine answered the careless tone defiantly,

“Because it is one of the beautiful things. Maori girls give them sometimes to the one they love when he is going away. It means ‘Come back. I am waiting always.’ The red berries show the fire of love.”

“Pretty. An’ I can never understand? Don’t you think you should be sorry for me?”

“I would be—if you were sorry for yourself.”

Kin got back to his saddle slowly.

“Perhaps I am—sometimes,” he said.

CHAPTER XIV

JOSEPHINE'S LAND

"THAT's a bit of the story, isn't it? Let me see."

Kin turned down that flap of his pocket and spread his hand over.

"Likely! You say such nice things of my work when you do see it."

"Well, it's done you good. You've made Dick much happier. He sits outside your door, and purrs when you won't let him in. I've seen him."

"That hasn't done me any good. And you have done me lots of harm. You've shifted the focus of my mind, and I don't know where I am now."

"Do you mean that?" asked Josephine gravely.

Kin nodded.

"I suppose every grain of sand thinks itself a continent that can hold half the world's attention—until someone comes along and insists that it is only a grain of sand."

"I didn't insist. Really, I didn't. And a grain of sand can hold a man's attention very thoroughly when it gets in his eye. One thing at a time, and that done well, you know. And you can get in men's eyes, even though it is only to make them sting."

"Thanks," said Kin, sliding off the verandah rail; "I'll presume that you meant that kindly. Do you know that I've been here sixteen weeks on Friday, and my book is nearly done—and I'm afraid of it."

"Why?"

"You'll know some day—perhaps." He gripped

the rail until his nails cut into the rotting wood. "It means so much that I'm afraid, and it's your blame——"

"Mine? In what way?"

Josephine sat on the rail, with her head among the ivy; and the last leaves of a Virginia creeper were red on her hair. Kin looked at her, smoking slowly.

"Yours; and perhaps Doody's. I can't tell you how——"

"I think I know. When you began to write you just thundered out that there was no poet in all the world but Shakespeare. Now you've got to admit that there is Tennyson too. And that has upset your calculations."

Kin pulled out his pipe, and stared.

"Now, how in the name of fortune did you know that?" he demanded.

"You'll know some day—perhaps." She sprang up; but Kin saw the flush run up her face. "I promised to take you over the house, didn't I? Come now, before it's dark enough for candles. Don't hold up your head as if the place belonged to you, or you'll get bumped; and don't be scared if you hear all sorts of noises. It is only my own people."

"Your what?"

"Yes. All the sisters and brothers and playmates I ought to have had, you know. When there's a wind I hear them racing up and down the passages, and I go and race too. I never see anything; but I can always pretend they are behind me. Katty says it's ghosts, and Grannie says it's rats. But I know it's just my own people."

"Great Heavens above! What a life! It would send me crazy."

"It's beautiful," cried Josephine, flinging out her hands. "They are just darlings, all my brothers and sisters—and we never quarrel. Look out for your head."

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She led down twisted passages where Kin's tread broke through the rotten flooring, and into naked rooms where the eaves sloped into four-foot cupboards that ran full length of the wall.

"The doors are never shut," said Josephine, banging one and turning the handle. "They are so empty, poor things; and I think they call to the others for pity. I come in and talk to them sometimes—to cheer them up, you know."

"Doubt if they'd be grateful." Kin stared across the passage, where more cupboards gaped like vacant mouths. "I should say they were undergoing a life sentence—expiating a sin, or something. Did you ever hear such a hush in all your days?"

"It's the architect who ought to be expiating his sins—unless he was hanged long ago. Mind those steps."

"Don't laugh here, for Heaven's sake," said Kin, and shuddered. "It echoes like a vault. What's this? The box Ginevra was locked in to die?"

Josephine flung the lid open and dipped in, bringing out handfuls of filmy lace shawls to trail about her quick feet.

"Look; isn't it lovely? And old—so old. Smell it. Sandal wood and lavender."

"Bridal veil, eh?" Kin caught a loose end and drew it over her hair. "I saw a bride in a thing like this once."

Josephine looked up, and her eyes were wide and dark through the mesh.

"Truly? Then—then it must be my mother's. I don't think Grannie knows anything about them. Oh, I wonder if my mother was like me. I wonder."

The shadow of Kin's uplifted arm fell blackly across the veil, and he pulled it away in haste, with

the thought of some half-remembered superstition working in him.

"Have you no pictures of her, then? Yes—put it away——"

"No. Grannie and Katty won't speak of her, and I can't remember further back than Jin. She was my nurse before Pete married her, you know. Feel these kid slippers. So soft—and aren't they tiny. My mother must have had such sweet little feet. Much smaller than mine. I put on the other things sometimes, and try to guess what she looked like. Do you think—I wonder if she was pretty."

It was wistfulness shook the voice, and Kin noted it.

"Yes; I'm sure she was pretty—and good. She's left proof of that."

"Do you think so?" Josephine laid the shoes away tenderly. "I wish—I do wish sometimes—that someone would tell me of my mother."

"No one has ever told me of mine." Kin turned on his heel abruptly. "This way, is it?"

She took him up steps where the dry rot worked; and the whisper of unwoke boards was under their feet, and the wind from cracked rafters athwart their faces.

". . . And if you can climb a ladder with three broken rungs," said Josephine, "I'll show you my own land. There are stairs in front of the house, but they're not safe."

"You live up there? By yourself?"

"Now, can you imagine Katty or Grannie on a ladder? Their rooms are close to the kitchen. But I like to be nearer the beginning of things; I can see the morning made, here—and the night."

Kin climbed the steepness, and stood on the shaky landing, half blind from the dark of the way. The lattice windows gaped wide, to show to the man all

Josephine's land of purity and greatness and silence. Mists slid along the river and through green flax and marsh land to the sea, where the slow ruled waves were gold wire. There was king's purple on the tussock hills to northward, and against the tender sunset sky flared the bleak shingle mountains that only the stars and some shepherds knew. A glacier rightward showed like split blood; but it was the gold of an iron pyrites peak that sent a reflection to Josephine's hair as she leaned from the window.

"I see your light through the trees some mornings when I awake very early," she said. "It looks like a broken bad egg in the mist. Do you mean to do that sort of thing all your life?"

"I hope so." Kin dropped carefully down the rungs again. "Tenth step that's gone, is it? And twelfth? All right. I'll bring over some nails tomorrow."

"That's Doody's whistle, I fancy. Be kind to him. Costock's sheep were in Dick's turnips again this morning and Doody went over to sort matters out. He wants an outlet. Been walking up and down the earth looking for a row lately."

Josephine's laugh came down after him.

"It's your fault entirely. You would render it 'quem' last night."

"So did you—because I told you to," muttered Kin, and grinned privately.

For Doody wore his heart in his anxious eyes, and on his mouth, for such as Kin to see; and Kin grinned again, meeting him on the side verandah with Katty and a bucket of coals. Josephine took the old woman by the shoulders in a sudden seriousness.

"Katty, I heard this morning that a lot of miners came up here once, and made those shot holes in the kitchen wall. You always said it was Dick. Where

did they come from, and why did they do it? And why did you tell me a story?"

Kin saw the flicker of something on the flat withered face, and it roused him before he heard Doody's gasp from behind.

"Ut's that spalpeen besaide ye told ut," cried Katty. "Dad, then; couldn't ye kape yer tongue in yer head? Josie, avic, I du not know what ye'd be talkin' ov, an' that's the trut'."

"You've given yourself away, Katty darling," said Josephine cheerfully.

"Now you're going to be court-martialled. Take her shovel and stand sentry, Doody. And it was Pete who told me——"

"Arrah! Jist wait till the misthress gits the taste ov her tongue tu him——"

"And why shouldn't he, then? Now, what did they come for? Go on."

"Josie—don't bother about that, dear. It's so old, and——"

"It's not old to me. You can go away, Doody, if you don't want to hear. Now, Katty."

Kin's slow look made Doody's blood tingle.

"It's not a nice story, Josie. It's—not worth the telling."

"You have a peculiarly tactful way of allaying her interest," remarked Kin, sitting on the edge of the bucket.

Doody's hands were stiff at his sides; but his eyes showed a stern anger that made them suddenly old.

"Don't ask about it, Josie——"

"It's not worth the telling," supplemented Kin, idly. "And Doody knows what is best for you, you know."

Josephine turned her back on both men.

"Go on, Katty," she said. "The whole truth, and nothing but the truth, or I'll pull your cap off."

"Ye're born tu the thrick ov worritin', Josie, ye mad thing. An' how wud ye have me tell things wid only wan toof in me head, an' that wobbles? Let me pasht, then——"

"Stand where you are, Doody. Katty, you don't use teeth for truth telling. They are for telling age, as every farmer knows; and a woman's age is never the truth. I found that in a book. Well?"

Katty's chin was twitching. Kin saw it. He knew fear in a face over well.

"I will not tell ut, then. Misther Doody——"

"Don't ask me to stop her," said Doody bitterly; and the cruelty woke in Kin.

He crossed over to Josephine, and spoke that the boy might not hear.

"I followed you blind once. Do it for me now. Let the thing go, please."

The beginning of the dread shadow was in Josephine's eyes.

"Why? I don't understand. What is it?"

"Nothing to hurt you. Please."

She pushed back her hair with both hands, and only Kin saw her lips quiver.

"People are always telling me not to ask about things. I wish—oh, take your old bucket and go, Katty. I don't want to hear your silly story. It's sure to be another ghost—or a penance—or a purgatory."

That night Doody stopped Kin on the threshold of his rooms.

"You may say that I have no right to ask what you are doing," he said; and his voice was under heavy restraint. "But—there are times when it is well for a man to look ahead, or—or he may do more harm than he intends."

It was the fearless challenge of a boy-knight, and Kin met it honourably, according to his tenets.

"Don't you trouble your young head, Doody. It's all right. I'm goin' soon, an' I'm not comin' back."

"Does she know that?"

Kin shrugged his shoulders.

"Blest if I know—or care. Well; what else?"

"You are with her most days now," said Doody steadily. "And if you are using her for copy only, you are——"

"Don't say it. You're not big enough for me to hit, Doody, and I might be tempted—you're too fond of tryin' to interfere, young un', an' you haven't a hope——" Kin stretched himself, yawning. "I'll do what I like," he said; "an' I'd like to go to bed now. Good-night."

In the next ten days Kin took his work to him with both hands, and told himself and Mr. Tubbs that there was nothing else in all the world that mattered. And the story got hold of him; battenning on him, and drawing its life from his, until the relentless reality, and the doubts that crept in when he went out for speech with his fellows, told in his face, moving Dick to remonstrance. Dick ruled his feet straighter of late, and took his pay full tale from such curt words of approval as Kin thought to give.

But Kin would not hear.

"I can't," he said, when Dick suggested that he should dock a sufficiency of hours from the all he was giving; "an' I won't. I must be done with it. I hate it."

"What! I thought it was more to you than anything else."

"So it is. Much more. You don't understand. Get out, Dickie. I'm busy. I'll play with you

when this is on the high seas. Now I'm playing by myself, an' all the hitting has to be done off my own bat. You can stand outside, and mark the score if you like."

"But——"

"Is that hint not strong enough? Will you go, you weariful man, before I put you out by the shoulders?"

And so it was that through heavy sloughs that clogged his feet, and high windy moments when he sat a-top of the world with they whom he had created, Kin's book drew to a close, and the page of life was shut down. He sent it away, and turned to Dick for consolation.

"Do with me what you will, my lord. I am putty in your hands. I am without cheer and without resource. I have sent all my family away in a boat, and they'll never belong to me any more for ever. An' I don't know what sort of a 'How-d'you-do' the world is going to say to 'em. An' at this present moment I don't care."

"You'll take a rest now, old chap. What times we'll have, Kin——"

"Can't. I'll have to upsticks, an' get back to work. Haddington's beginning to bellow."

"You're a nice sort to call yourself a sensible man," said Dick disgustedly. "Look at the holes in your cheeks, and the veins sticking out on your forehead. You've been half-cracked with neuralgia this week, I'll bet—and you talk of going to work. Kin, do you know what a holiday is?"

"Death, I suppose," said Kin.

He sat on the edge of the bed with his arms dropping, and there was weariness in every line of him.

"Kin, you're not fit—let me coddle you up a bit now, old chap."

"Great Scott! No. Thanks all the same, Dickie.

But that would send me wild in a week. No; I must get back to Sydney before my proofs come in, or I shan't be able to attend to 'em. See?"

"No, I don't. You can attend to them here. Why in the name of madness go back to Sydney? You have starved there twice."

"Natural cussedness, I suppose. She nearly beat me. I'm going back to beat her—or to let her finish the job. The chance falls either way."

"You—you're not going because you're sick of me, Kin?"

"No. You've been mighty good to me, Dickie, an' I don't deserve it. You've given me a pain in what I suppose is my conscience, if that's any consolation to you. I believe I'm a brute to you, Dick; but I can't help it. My work takes all I can give—an' that's not enough."

"Do you ever want anything but your work?" said Dick. "For I don't think——"

"Yes," said Kin, walking up and down unevenly, "much too often. I want the moon—and several constellations——"

"What for?"

"To juggle with. To show that the man's as good as the writer—an' better. To make a fool o' myself—to put my work—which is all the best o' me—down in the mud for the elevation of my own private self——"

"If I knew in the least what you were getting at——"

"Gettin' at myself, o' course. My dear Dick, I'm a fool, and you're a fool, an' the rest of the world's the other one. It's quite right. We all start out to keep time to our own beat, an' it's only when we find that we've been prancin' to the world's chorus all the while that it begins to hurt. I've learnt a lot of things I didn't want to know down here, Dickie, an' I'm very unthankful for them yet. And the bearing of this lies in the

application—I take a hat, you take a hat; we go out and take the air with a horse. Come on.”

Followed a fortnight of strident weather, with long frosty nights in the whares or in the billiard room when Dick needed him badly; and mornings on the wild hills where the snow fled before the wind, and the pack horses came down shapeless with rabbit skins; and afternoons by the grey sea where the drift wood piled, or at the Cunliffes, sparring with Josephine until Doody was sick to his finger nails with misery. Kin wrote no stories those days. He was impatient of all things: seeking peace and finding it not; tempting the half-waking pain of his nerves by daily fights with the surf under a winter sky, and burning Haddington's letters in a ribald defiance.

“We'll settle up when I go back, my friend, an' there'll be blue flames then, an' no error. But I guess it's not you who's going to kick the beam, Haddington—'nless I can get my universe straightened up somehow. It's suffering a bad earthquake just at present.”

But the straightening of the universe came suddenly, making a distinct threefold trouble of the one. There was a bleak wet wind out in the fading daylight, and a red fire with three chairs drawn up in the library. Doody had come from foot work on the snow line, and his teeth were chattering yet. He was six years older than he had been two months back, and this lay to Kin's charge alone. Kin knew it, watching over the hand that nursed his pipe bowl, and spreading his legs to the blaze. But the unnameable thing that bothered him left no room for pity that a man's face called for.

Then the door burst wide, to cast in Katty with her apron trailing by a string, and her grey hair all abroad. “Josie! Wuther on me—J-Josie,” she spluttered, and swamped Doody with tears.

"What is it? What is it? For Heaven's sake—what is it?"

"Stop shaking her, you young idiot—hand over that whiskey, Kin, and the glass. Hold her up—by jingo, she must have run all the way. That's better. Now, Katty, spit it out. What's the bother?"

"Troed—troed on a broke dish, an' s-shpoutin' like a whale—an' why shouldn't she, then. Eh, hock, ahon-e-e——"

"An artery. Did Mrs. Cunliffe——"

"The mistress is puttin' on turnagains, sure, an' sendin' me tu be sendin' you fur a docthor——"

"I'll go," cried Doody. "I'll——"

"Shut up, will you? Katty, you needn't whip the cat yet. Mrs. Cunliffe knows how to fix a tourniquet. Kin, you'll have to go down for Finlayson——"

"I'm lighter. Lend me Lilith, and I'll bring him in an hour——"

"Don't be an ass. You'd never get him at all. He's a big man, and he'll need a man to bounce him. He hates turning out o' wet nights, and it'll be dark 'fore you're halfway there, Kin."

Kin was lacing his boots with firm fingers.

"Shall I take two horses?" he asked.

"No. Get one from the stables. Don't let him drive, for the fords will be heavy. All serene; come along, old lady. Yes, you do the crying for the family, I know. But you needn't let it out all on me."

A flask was rammed into Kin's hands as he sent his feet home in the stirrups.

"Finlayson may be out on the hills somewhere, or down the gorge; and it's going to be a rough night. But—you'll find him, Severne?"

Doody's white face showed beyond the glow of the pipe bowl, and Kin answered it, gathering the reins.

"Don't you fret, kid; I'll find him," he said.

CHAPTER XV

“DEARER THAN ALL IN LIFE TO ME”

—(*Napoleon's Farewell*)

THE sky was mud, and the earth was mud; and the sickly daylight between held a wild wind mixed with sleet. Lilith faced it, unwilling and sulky, so that Kin fought with her grimly across the slippery bridge plank-ing and up the cutting where new-born streams ran in gutters. Above the Cunliffes' house a trail of white smoke spread into the semblance of a winding sheet, and Kin hung the mare's head away from it with an oath, driving her down the darkening track into the night. Then he dragged the poncho-collar higher about his ears, and crouched against the fierce scud that met him.

“An' now you'd best put your back into it, my beauty,” he said, “or I'll give you some medicine you won't like.”

Wither and girth had warmed to the saddle, and Lilith's great heart warmed with them. She reached out, loosing the rein, and slung forward at a sure-foot gallop that brought the shriek of keen wind round Kin's ears. The grey thread of road blurred into a storm-ridden distance, and turned familiar landmarks to wild shapes that reeled past and howled. The rain on Kin's eyelashes made tangled pictures that answered the thought of his brain, and wore all one girl's face and one form.

There was Josephine, swinging in a supple-jack loop with the low sun red behind her; Josephine, with grave intent eyes, and the sweetness of sympathy on her mouth; Josephine, with dancing feet among the ripples

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on the foreshore, and all Heaven’s gladness in the lilt of the merry tongue; Josephine—Josephine—Josephine—until the wind took the word, and swept it to the sky and back again, to catch the echo in the beat of Lilith’s hoofs. And the beat of the hoofs grew to a tune that clacked in through Kin’s brain to his very heart:

“Dearer than all in life to me;
Companion of my destiny——”

Then the blindness that held him broke, and he knew.

“God!” he said, and fumbled the reins, and dropped them, sitting still with the numbness of awe and realisation on him.

“What,” he said with stiff lips; “what——” and the beat of the hoofs flung it at him:

“Dearer than all in life to me——”

It came to him mercilessly, directly, fiercely, because the power to learn and to teach by tender ways was never his; and it therefore hurt by strength of the knowledge, until the sweat came out on him, and he bowed his head forward to the mane.

The dark shut down, and Lilith slackened pace and stopped at a ford where water ran among the rushes with a little hissing sound. Kin pulled himself upright, half dazed, and rubbed the wet off his face.

“What is it, old girl? Lilith—what——” Then the mighty grip on mouth and barrel drove her in with a splash, lifting her forward to the bank.

“I’ll make her care. I’ll make her. Curse you, mare; stand up, will you!”

Then he sent home the spurs, and laughed at the racing night.

"It's the only thing that matters—the only thing. Laleefa knew it, and I know. My little girl! Wait till I tell you—ah!"

It was the suggestion that he might not tell her this side eternity, and it flicked his brain as a whiplash flicks a cut.

Finlayson's housekeeper opened the door to a man with dripping oilskins and a face that startled her. She told how Finlayson had gone up the gorge beyond the township in the forenoon to set a broken leg, and added that she did not expect him back whilst the rain held.

"For the river will be up in the gorge," she said; "an' the doctor ain't fond o' getting wet. He'll maybe be back to-morrow night."

"I think he'll be back before then," remarked Kin, and went round to Comyn's stables.

Comyn offered his best horse promptly.

"He's up to Finlayson's weight; and he's hearted for what yer'll have to-night—which Finlayson isn't, I may tell yer. I doubt yer'll get him."

"I don't. Anderson's, is it? First clump o' bush beyond the Pillar? Thanks. Good-night."

The night was wild on the plain where it gaped to the distant gorge; but Kin crossed it in a full rank triumph that left no place for a weaker thought. Josephine belonged to him through all the ages of time to be; and very presently he would put his arms round her and take her away with him, across the world and into the glory of Love Everlasting. A man may not know that he has been starved until the smell of food tickles his nostrils; then he realises, with a wonder for the strait days wherein he was content. Kin did not feel the reef of the reins in his hands, nor the bite of wind on his reddened neck, nor the chill of the sleet-cased stirrups that struck through the boot sole. The great thing that he had groped for, unknowing, was hot about his

heart; and the pulses drummed into his ears and to the back of his eyeballs, to cast streaks of colour abroad on the dark.

The ragged cabbage trees that shook torn leaves and passed hinted Doody's slim boyhood, and the note in his voice that Kin had not understood until now. Kin laughed at it, stooping his shoulder to the smite of the sleet.

“You've had your chance, Doody. It's mine now—mine only.”

Then the memory of his work was swift upon him, with all that it had been to him, and was meant to be. And he laughed at that also.

“You're first, Josie; first now and always. Oh, my God, but it makes a man afraid——”

And then came thought of his bond to Haddington.

The evil smell of swamp flax rose across the night, and the rain washed the taste to his lips, turning him sick with impure suggestiveness. Came the spume of yellow water about his feet, and the weight on the rein as the led horse stumbled among the blattering stones of the ford.

Kin shook off the something that was gripping him, and brought the horses through cunningly, and in silence. At the third ford the water lapped the saddle-bow, and the led horse began to kick. Kin slipped Lilith's reins, and came athwart the other, punishing him sternly up the farther bank to the very door of the hut that stood back of the Pillar. Here he hammered the panel, and followed his knock over the threshold; for the rising flood was like to sweep out all fords in a short hour, and it was not good to think on what might come after.

Anderson was on the bunk by the fire, with his little pinched wife beside him. Finlayson had the cut-down cask with a soft sacking bottom, and his

ruddy face shone with good feeding and rum. A river ran from each of Kin's heels as he came forward, pushing back his souwester.

He spoke curtly and with full explanation, and Finlayson grunted, poking the blaze with a slippered toe.

"My dear sir," he said, "you couldn't ask a dog to go out a night like this. I have complete faith in Mrs. Cunliffe; she'll manage all right, I am sure."

"I brought the roan gelding from Comyn's stables," said Kin. "He's first class at water. Better ride in your boots, hadn't you? Where are they?"

Finlayson turned, looking up at the head atop the reeking oilskins; and the steadiness of jaw and eye disconcerted him.

"I—er—really—you can't expect me——"

"I do expect you. Have you got oilskins?"

"Leave them there, Mrs. Anderson. I don't want them. I don't know who you may be, my man; but I tell you, I'm not going out to-night for all the powers of Hell."

Kin laughed joyously, as a child might. The swirl of passion down his blood was shouting for some earthly thing to conquer; and this broad man with the heavy thighs and shoulders was good meat.

"Oh, but I think you are. That's what I'm here for. An' I wouldn't dawdle much if I were you. The fords'll go directly, an' you won't stomach passin' 'em after, I should fancy."

Anderson spoke from the bunk. He was pure back-country breed.

"It's nuthin' ter be feared o', doctor. You can't put Comyn's roan wrong, so's yer give him his head an' keep yer own."

"Quite so," said Kin, cheerfully. "It's not the ford you need be afraid of, Dr. Finlayson."

Anderson sniggered, drawing his hand over his rough mouth.

“He’s boss, that feller. He’s boss where he goes. Wunner will he punch Finlayson d’reckly.”

Finlayson laid more wood on the fire, and there was a silence. The squeal of wet oilskins broke it as Kin dropped them on the floor.

“Get out of that chair,” he said.

“You go to —,” said Finlayson, without looking up.

Kin put his hand under the round elbow, and lifted. Finlayson came up, stuttering and black with wrath.

“That’ll do,” said Kin curtly. “There’s no time for civilities. I’m sorry to be rude, Dr. Finlayson; but if you won’t come quietly I’ll have to make you. An’ I can make you.”

The compelling force of a man who will prove the worth of his words if need be was taut in Kin, and Finlayson’s eyes blinked and wavered.

“This is an outrage on decent society,” he said.

“Very like. Don’t know much about decent society, myself; but there’ll be a few more outrages if you don’t make better time into your boots than that.”

Outside the hut Finlayson groaned as he climbed into the saddle.

“A doctor’s life is never his own. If I die doing my duty—what’s that?”

“Only the leading rein——”

Finlayson exploded.

“Take it off! Confound you! D’you think——”

“No, I don’t think. You’d sneak back to the hut soon’s you got the smell of the river. There’s no use makin’ a row, Finlayson. I’m in better condition than you, an’ that’s the whole question o’ what one man owes another just now. We’ll talk about society rights to-morrow. Come along.”

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The bee clock on Anderson's chimney piece told of half-six as Kin shut the door, and he bucketted the horses down to the ford full speed. Where dry sand had blown in dust that morning, water slopped to Lilith's fetlocks, and the smell of new-slid earth was heavy on the wind. It was a delirium of mad waves and slashing tortured flax and grinding boulders that came with the spate. Finlayson was blankly terrified, and the roan grew angry as the straight bit wrenched his mouth. Kin flung just one warning:

"You're goin' through with it now, Finlayson. If you won't go over you'll drown. But you're goin' through with it."

In the blackness that was pricked out by the sharp points of sleet, flax tangled the underway, and rotten shingle banks gave no foothold. There was the crackle of driftwood; the sob of wet sand to the hoof; then a clumsy splash as a shelving ridge let them into the stream. The ford was swept out, and the roan fought the water with Kin hauling on the lead-rope until his palms ran blood. He was cursing at Finlayson through the rack.

"Leave his head loose, will you? Leave it——"

The river sang in his ears as Finlayson canted against him, bearing him doubled across the saddle. Lilith screamed, forced down by the weight; and the nasty grate of rolling boulders stung Kin to fury.

That night came to Finlayson many times in after years, to shake him sweating on his bed with the remembered cut of a wet rein across his face, and a rough voice shouting through the dark:

"Stick to him, can't you? Loose his head, an' stick to him. By ——, I'll put you under——" Then the lift of water was beneath his thighs, washing out his grip on the leather, so that he clung, sick and weak, to the mane, knowing that this was but the

first ford. And always that dominant voice was beside him, slashing him into a feeble manhood with the rasp of its words.

It was Doody and Macintosh who brought the lantern blurr to the stable gates, and helped the two men down.

“For my legs have got as much bend in ’em as pitchforks,” said Kin; “an’ I rather fancy Finlayson is worse. Yes; I gave him most o’ your flask——”

Then he held his breath, waiting for Doody’s voice.

“You’ll come in as soon as you’ve thawed your hand, Finlayson? We—we think she’s rather weak——”

Kin was holding to Macintosh’s shoulder. He stood upright, shaking.

“Where is she?” he said.

“Ye hae dune yer share, lad. There air dry claes——”

“Where is she?”

“Just i’ the kitchen wi’ her Grannie.”

Kin followed the tramp of feet in the overmastering desire to take Josephine up in his arms, and to hold her away from all pain and danger and the touch of other men. But on the boarded floor his boot slipped in something wet and sticky, and the world went giddy before him, with the little group across the room swaying through bright light in the centre. And thereafter he stood apart in a corner and watched her suffer; with Katty wailing under her apron, and Mrs. Cunliffe moving back and forth with the red on her bony fingers, and the grey on her unchanged face.

At long last Finlayson stood up, and Doody’s gasp of thankfulness roused Kin.

He came down the room to hear Josephine cry:

“You can put down your apron, Katty darling. We’ve finished playing hide-and-seek, and I’m going to bed.”

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Then her eyes caught Kin's, and the suffering went out of them before a great womanly pity.

"Oh, you're so wet—and so very very cold. Doody, take him home and look after him. And I'll say 'Thank you' in the morning."

Kin's muttered answer was for her alone.

"I'll want you to say more than that," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HIGHER KNOWLEDGE

"GOD knows. God knows. It's gone beyond me altogether."

Kin lay face down on the hilltop, with his hands gripped in the rough tussock, and made his first conscious prayer—

"God—show me; for I can't understand——"

Sky and earth and the wide air were purged pure by the storm of the night; and the majesty of the risen sun had swept Kin into touch of that wonder which is beyond the daily handling of men. The imagination and the insight that made his life reached forward to grapple with it, and he stumbled in bewilderment down new ways that made the past track very old and far behind. "I can't understand, oh, God. My work is dearer than my soul, and she is dearer than both. What have you to do with it——?"

A wet muzzle slobbered his neck, and Kin rolled over to grab Mr. Tubbs by the tail, and pull himself down to earth again. Mr. Tubbs had been chasing rabbits in the sand hills below, and six inches of pink tongue hung out of his mouth to wash Kin's face with. Kin suffered it, lying still, and staring at the sky. He was bodily and mentally battered, and the first great joy was broken already under the feet of common sense.

"Come here, Mr. Tubbs," he said, pulling the muddy forepaws on to his chest. "We are calling out the secret on our own housetop, sir, and we don't

quite know what to do. It's going to be painful, I think."

Mr. Tubbs wagged his tail, and showed white well-kept teeth. Kin held the soft little paws firmly.

"I can never go back," he said. "Do you understand? I paid away all I had for the love of my work. And my work is no more to me now than a dead rabbit is to you, Mr. Tubbs. Do you think that doesn't hurt? Do you think that it doesn't hurt like —? I tell you, she's just a slip of a girl, an' I don't know whether I want to go down on my face and kiss the hem of her petticoat, or whether I will kiss her mouth and make her kiss me back."

Kin's hands were hurting Mr. Tubbs, and he whined. Kin cast him aside, and sat up. The sky was pale where the sun drained colour from it to swamp the sea; but across the river and above the Cunliffes' house it held the blue of the Madonna's robe. Kin watched where a white cloud lay on the breast of the blue, and the wonder was dark in his eyes yet.

"To think I didn't know yesterday," he said. "It's going to hurt, for there'll be Haddington directly. But to think I didn't know—Josie! Josie! will I be able to write of the things that you see now?"

Mr. Tubbs snapped at a grey-and-purple butterfly where the warm wind blew it sideways, and it fluttered off over the far-below red tussock and the clumped sheep, where Dick's shepherd wrought in a fervour that belonged to the old life. It had no part in the sunlit silence and mystery of the hilltop.

A lark rose from the brown shoulder of the mountain behind Dick's house, and took his song straight up to Heaven's gate. Kin's eyes dropped with it as it came to earth again. Then he took out his pipe, filled it, and walked the tussock with tired uneven steps.

"Now we'll count up our pennies an' find out how

very rich we are," he said. "Let's see; what's the first one? A married man who takes his life deserves to be blackballed by Satan an' all his angels! Dick said that when St. Hill shot himself. He was quite right too. Now, supposin' that Haddington gets the lien over me, I commit a seven-year suicide—he'll make very sure o' that. Then—yes; this penny claims its face value, every inch."

Mr. Tubbs was asleep and snoring shamelessly in the heat when Kin dropped beside him and took his punishment grimly, with none to see. It was the price paid for the Higher Knowledge, and it brought the sweat out on him, and a knot in his throat. It meant just the breaking of all that a man's pride may hold dear for the right to speak love words to one girl. But that one girl was Josephine; and though shame burnt and tingled him, Kin painfully drew the line of march up to him, and set down the steps one by one.

"Dick would try to father the National Debt if I asked him. He'll back me. I'll go over next week an' see Haddington. He's a money-grubber, an' he'll let me buy myself off at a price. An'—if he says that I love her more than my honour I can't ram the lie down his throat. For it isn't a lie. I'll give her my honour—an' all the big things I could do—an' the very soul out o' me, if she'll only take 'em an' play with 'em. It's hurtin' you, Doody, but, by gum, you don't know what hurtin' means. You haven't got to go begging of Haddington."

He had begged for food in other days, and the galled marks were not to be worn away by time. But the taste of this would be bitter as tears, and he knew it. He got up, stirring Mr. Tubbs gently with his foot.

"We'll go down into the market place again, sir; though it's no business of the public what we sell

there. If we could tell her first—but that's a coward's trick. We mustn't come with our hands tied, Mr. Tubbs."

"Yah-h-h!" yawned Mr. Tubbs, and tumbled down hill at Kin's heels, with a wary eye roving for rabbits.

Kin found Dick in the wool shed, where the men were cleaning up, and he asked a question that set Dick's light eyes staring.

"Dick, if I wanted money—cash down—how much could you let me have?"

"Five thousand, perhaps—twice that if you give me a bit of time. What——?"

"I'll tell you if it's needed. I can't say when I could pay you back."

"You mean it, then? All right, old chap. I'd be proud to lend it to you, an' I wouldn't dun you—Any—anythin' wrong, Kin?"

"No. Oh, not at all, thanks. How do the south boats run, Dick? I'm wantin' to get back to Sydney soon's I can."

"Come along in an' see. We've got a yesterday's paper. You—you think you must go, Kin?"

"Should have gone long ago. *Wakatipu*, *Rotomahana*—she'll do. When——?" Dick peered over his shoulder.

"You won't catch her unless you start this afternoon. She leaves the Bluff Monday night."

"I can't. I can't go to-day." Kin's voice roughened. "Next week, then—*Mararoa*. I'll ride down to the township an' wire for a berth."

"All right. And you might call at the Cunliffes, too, Kin. Finlayson saw Jo before he left, but there might be a message or some medicine, perhaps."

Kin was unprepared, and her name struck him on the raw nerves of his being. But he had never

flinched from the schooling Life gave; and a half-hour later he stood up to meet Josephine's questions stoutly.

"Right as a trivet, thanks. Well—Lilith lamed herself on a rock, and Finlayson says I'm no gentleman. Isn't that enough to make a man look bothered? Oh, just a touch of neuralgia. Nothing to matter, thank you."

Josephine's fingers touched his, shyly and softly.

"It is I should say that. You were in the greatest danger last night—because of me——"

"Don't! Don't! You're not crying—oh please——"

She was weak and white from the blood-letting, and her head lay heavy along the red cushions. The very rings of hair about her soft face called up a reference in Kin, and he watched her under his bent hand, guarding himself loyally, and speaking cunningly of all things that did not matter.

The morrow was strange and difficult as this, and the morrows beyond it; until there came the last night in the billiard room at the red house, and Doody went off to bed, leaving Kin yawning over a late pipe. Dick pulled down the hanging lamp, and distended cheeks for the blowing out.

"Doody's looking sick these days," he said casually.

"That brat Jo is giving him a rough time, fool that he is. Knowing the stock she comes from, he ought to have more sense."

"What?"

Kin was on his feet, and the word rang out like a pistol shot. Dick looked blank. Then he turned scarlet, stooping over the lamp.

"Eh?" Oh, never mind. I forgot. It doesn't matter, Kin——"

Kin came over and pushed the lamp up. And the anger was white in his face.

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“You’ll take back what you said about—her. D’you hear? Take it back.”

Her name was too dear for him to speak; but the thought of it shook his voice. Dick gasped, stared; finally rubbed his forehead and stuttered:

“How the—what the—why, Kin——”

“Well?”

Dick had conviction, having loved plentifully for his years.

“You—you love her?” he said.

“Yes.”

It was the simple directness of it that upset Dick. He collapsed on a settee.

“You love her,” he repeated helplessly. “You—you——” he fumbled with the puzzle as if it had been a match box that would not open. “You—oh, curse old Mother Cunliffe. Why didn’t I tell you the truth at first.”

Something cold dropped on Kin’s heart and deadened it. But face and voice were without expression.

“You’ll tell me the truth now. Now! Do you hear me, Dick?”

Dick muttered, hesitated, crossed the room slowly, and put his hands on Kin’s shoulders. His florid puffy face was stiff with fear.

“Kin—if you love her, it means—do you want to marry her?”

“Yes.”

“Then,” said Dick, “I wish to Heaven she had sunk in the quicksand——”

Kin’s swift movement sent him back against the billiard table.

“By ——, if you were anyone else, Dick! What is it? *What?*”

“You can’t marry her.”

“Why?” said Kin, and his voice was very quiet.

"Old man, I'm sorry——"

"Why?"

"Kin, I'd give——"

"D—— you! Will you speak? Why?"

"You know the story of the Deadman's Hut," said Dick sullenly. "That's Jo's story. Her father was a murderer, and her mother was—worse. Kin, she's no mate for you."

"Oh, you are a fool," said Kin, and laughed out, sitting on the table edge. "Do you think I care what her father and mother were? I want her—only Josie——"

"You will care when you know it all," said Dick relentlessly. "The mother was Pete's half-sister, and a barmaid down in the township. Heaven knows what made Cunliffe marry her. He did it on the quiet, and there were rows in plenty when he brought her home. He was more than half a savage himself when his temper was up. She was a pretty quiet little thing enough, I believe. Uneducated, of course; just a common servant girl——"

A flashlight of Josephine with the bridal veil and the shining silks about her twitched Kin's heart-strings.

"How much does she know?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing—as yet. The mother ran off soon after the child was born, and of course it's well known that Cunliffe followed up and killed, though he was never taken. Mrs. Cunliffe saw to that. She dresses her line by the commandments; but when the miners came up to make inquiries she stuck to her guns, and shielded her flesh and blood from them. And Katty backed her like a good one. It's near a twenty-year-old yarn now, and Pete is one of the very few who'd rake it up. Now you'll understand why we're civil to him. He wants to claim Jo and take her into the pub. And he'll do it, most like, when Mrs. Cunliffe dies."

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A tingling ran down to Kin's finger nails.

"Will he? I'll see to that. Where is the father? Dead?"

"Couldn't say. Mrs. Cunliffe writes to him—or did. What? My faith, Kin; you needn't call Jo's father and Mrs. Cunliffe's son a coward. No; but he was utterly rattled at the time, I fancy, and she shipped him off somewhere. There'd be no sense in his coming back now. He has killed; and the law likes to do its own killing."

Kin pushed up the window, thrusting his head out into the frost of the night. The stench of tobacco smoke and whiskey, and the echo of Dick's words, clogged the room behind and dizzied him.

Mr. Tubbs was hunting fleas under the table, and Dick routed him out with a vicious kick. Then he spoke tentatively.

"There's your work, Kin. And no man can serve two masters—let alone two mistresses. You mean to stick to your writing, don't you?"

"Of course I mean to stick to it," said Kin sharply. "How would I live else?"

"Now you're talking. But it must be your work or Jo. You're not a man to halve yourself like Solomon's babies. And if I know Jo, she won't let you. You couldn't come together, Kin. She has hoed her own row all her life. So have you. No woman is worth a man's career; least of all a woman with a taint in her——"

"If you were not a flagrant ass I'd wring your neck," said Kin, turning quickly. "If you talked till the Day of Judgment do you think you could make me alter my mind one grain's weight, you infernal fool? You've shown me that I must ask her now—now—lest trouble comes to her before I can get back. And that's all you've done with your talking."

"Don't, Kin. Think it over——"

"Dickie, if I had loved as many times as you I'd know better than to give advice. Faith, it's taken me more than a quarter of a century to learn how to spell Love, an' I'm hanged if I'm goin' to set to the unlearnin' yet. There; go along to bed——"

Dick cast a parting stone from the doorway of Kin's rooms.

"You're offering all the tenders in this contract, Kin."

Kin grinned widely, kicking off his slippers.

"All right, old chap. I won't ask you to foot that bill for me. Night, Dickie. You needn't shut the door."

Dick never dared over-much with Kin. He dribbled sentences on the still air as he went up the verandah.

"Different breeds can't mate—it should be like to like——" Then the lilt of a song from round the corner—

"The hawk unto the open sky, The red deer to the wold;
The Romany lass for the Romany lad, As in the days of old."

But Kin sat on the bed, grinning still. Every word that Dick had hammered on him nailed conviction firmer. He believed that he could shield her from Pete, and from Haddington also, if need arose. For otherwise, why had God given to him such strength of body and soul, and to her such a pure child-heart?

"But I must tell her," he said. "I must tell her. Then she'll know what to do if she wants me. It's only pushing matters forward by a month or two. For whichever way things fall, I couldn't go through life and not have told her."

He thought of all the ways in which he would tell her, until the eastern window flushed to the pale dawn, and the sea wind, blowing over great spaces of

waking water, cooled the heat in his blood. Then he caught up boots and towels, shouted for Doody, and went out to bathe in the wash of the sea and the sun.

Kin watched Doody closely those last days. There was a hardness of fibre in him that often degenerated into cruelty among his fellows; but he held that away from the boy now, in a new-born pity.

"For it is not Doody," he said. "And it never will be; I know."

For it is the natural and unexplainable law, that no woman will take a Galahad whilst Launcelot is by in his tarnished armour.

Katty knew this, too, when Kin came over the river at the midday, seeking Josephine. He came to the kitchen door in a shamefaced shyness, and she rose up from her baking to pat his sleeve with both floury hands.

"Bedad, then, ye're ahl right," she said. "Ut's thrut' I was wonderin' wud ye come seekin' her wid that luke tu the face ov ye afure ye lift her. Arrah, bhoy; there's no sins tu go rid loike ye was a new babby—though ut's new enough ye both are tu ut. Bhut I did it mesilf in me own day—an' the taste ov ut's there yit."

"Is she in the house? Katty, you'll manage that I see her alone?"

"Alone, is ut? An' why shouldn't ye, then? Sure, she's down on the rocks wid her crayfush baskets an' a shtick—begorra, he's off loike he had ahl th' legs ov a flea tu him. Ahone! He's a lover—an' why shouldn't he be, then, wid wan loike her for the askin'."

The rock pools were draped with seaweed, and the colours in them were ochre and puce and glowing crimson where the anemones swayed. But the day was grey on sea and shore, and a cold wind blew out of

the westing. Josephine sat on a rock ledge, mending a crayfish pot. There was fur round her throat and on her head, and her small face looked pinched and white as she glanced up with a strip of flax between her teeth.

"It's too cold for you to be out," began Kin, standing over her, and a quick line showed down Josephine's brow.

"I am the best judge of that, thank you. I'm tired of rooms—and people."

She bit off the flax-end with a snap, and twisted it into the ripped side of the pot. Kin dropped on one knee, and his hands came over her's.

"Put that down," he said gently. "I want to speak to you."

The tone was over-masterful, for all its gentleness. Josephine jerked her fingers free, and her head went up.

"Well, you can speak. I am not stopping you."

"What is the matter, Josie?"

A light of anger and fear ran into her face.

"I am Miss Cunliffe—until I tell you otherwise."

"Then you'll tell me otherwise now, Josie. That's what I've come for——"

"I won't. I will not. If you went up the gorge for me, I brought you out of the quicksand. That makes things even. You have no right to take advantage——"

"One moment, please. Who said that I took an advantage?"

"I say so. It is true. You have taken advantage of me all the time."

Kin spoke guardedly; but his tone and his face were strange to her.

"That is rather a sweeping accusation—even for a girl. In what way have I taken advantage of you?"

"You know as well as I do," said Josephine coldly. "It's beginning to rain, and I'm going in. Give me my stick, please."

Kin laid his hand on the stick, and jerked it across the sand.

"In what way have I taken advantage of you?"

"You have used me as copy for your writings. You told Dick and Doody you would do it. You boasted about it—not once, but lots of times. You read me, and read me, and you took what you liked out of me. You taught me to trust you, and to tell you all that a girl might think and dream about. And you put it down in your stories—and sold it. That is what you have done to me."

The cold wind was blowing in from the sea with raindrops in it, and the tussock on the hills had faded under the cloud-wrack. Kin stood still. His lean face seemed to have faded, too.

"That is what you have done, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then give me my stick, please. I am going in."

"No. I won't ask who told you this. I can find out for myself—there is something that matters more just now. I love you better than the writing you are so bitter against; better than anything in all the world."

"And you use me for copy."

Kin's smile was tender.

"Love, you've got an exceedingly small sense of proportion. I would have used Heaven itself for copy once; my work meant so much to me. You know. I have told you so often. Now, you've put my work clean out of it. It is nothing to me beside you. Isn't that enough for you?"

"You have sold the thoughts I gave you——"

"Yes. I see no harm in that. A man isn't built like a woman, dear; and perhaps I was wrong. But

you taught me so much. You taught me love, dear, and respect for women——”

“Don’t bother to count. I’ll find it all in your book, I suppose.”

“That’s not fair, Josie—listen——”

“I won’t.”

“Josie——”

“Let me go——”

Kin caught her by the shoulders, and the hot passion of him swamped all else.

“Perhaps you will listen to this, then,” he said; and kissed her on the mouth, once and twice.

She stood until he loosed her, half afraid of her stillness. Then she slipped down on a rock, and caught up the salt water in her hands, splashing it on her face relentlessly.

“Have you taken enough copy now?” she said.

“I taught you to respect women——”

Kin laughed. The touch of her lips had unsteadied him.

“Don’t you believe yet? My little darling, would I have kissed you like that if you didn’t mean all the earth and more to me?”

“If I were half that you would not have dared.”

Kin made two strides, and held her wrists.

“Don’t struggle. You can’t do anything, and it might make me kiss you again. Listen—yes; you shall listen. I love you. I love you. I love you. You can never forget that kiss any more than I can. You can never forget me. We’ve seen too much of each other for that. You will never go into any of the places where we have been together without remembering that I love you. You will never look at my empty rooms across the river without remembering that I love you. You will never hear the sea crying out on the foreshore without remembering that I love you—through all the years

to come, my dear, my dear—and through all the ages beyond that.”

“You will make a very fine writer after all,” she said. “Go away and put that in a book—with all the rest.”

Kin’s hands fell away from her, and the madness left him.

“You’re quite right—there’s no excuse—except that—I love you.”

“I don’t want your love.”

“Josie, do you understand? You have made my work nothing—there is only you now.”

“I can’t help that. I don’t want your love. Get my stick and let me go.”

Kin brought her stick, and stood aside to watch her limp across the sand. And the scud drove by in heavy rain that drenched him before he knew that he stood bareheaded on the stretch of bare and silent beach.

Then he went to seek for Dick.

Dick was unequivocally drunk for the first time in six weeks. He offered Kin the dregs of his fifth whiskey, and shook his head over the refusal.

“Pity,” he said. “Grea’ pity. We’re going down township, y’know, and you might get talkin’ with Pete——”

Kin winced. The connection of Pete with Josephine was too new.

“Don’t trouble yourself. I shan’t go near Pete. What is it, Doody?”

“I’d better take you down. I’ve ordered the tander——”

“T-take you myself. See the last o’ you, Kin, ole f’low. Say, Kin, you g-got your latherin’ all right, eh? Ne’er mind, it’s always the tail of the kite keeps it down ’mong the tele——”

“You’re too drunk to touch,” said Kin quietly. “And you won’t remember what you’ve said when you

are sober. But you'd better keep your hands off me, Dick, or—or I might forget that you are drunk."

"All right," said Dick, unabashed. "You d-don't go 'way ev'y day, y'know. Horses ready, Doody? Got your traps, Kin? T-tell you I'm goin' to drive, Doody. You can sit behind, if you like."

They passed up the road full gallop, with the cart swinging to the stride. Doody, braced in the back seat, was muttering anxiously. But Kin had neither anger nor disgust for the man at his side. That would come later. At the Cunliffes' gate Dick pulled up with an oath. Kin snatched at the whip.

"Go on," he said. "We don't want to stop here."

"That's all you know. P-promised to take Honi down—here, you are, kid. Lug him up between us, Kin. What?"

"Don't make a fuss, Doody. I'll chuck the little beggar clear if we're pitched out. Sail ahead, Dick."

Under cover of the rug a shut baby hand pushed into Kin's.

"For you," whispered Honi; and Kin opened the hand, taking from it three dried supple-jack berries on a tough stalk.

"Who sent them?" he asked, bending close.

"Just Josie," said the child, and cuddled against his breast.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SPUR SMITES

HADDINGTON'S morning room looked through long French windows down a slope of garden and across the blue of Middle Harbour. There were roses in the garden, and butterflies in the warm air. But Haddington showed mean and shrivelled against the sunlight, and there was no animation in him. The man opposite paused in his speech to strike a match on the sole of a tan boot, and Haddington yawned.

"But what are the Land Commissioners supposed to be doing?" he asked. "You put it—ah—very badly in your letters, Grant."

"It's simple enough. Work for the niggers: forest-clearing—roads—settlements. They talk of putting a road through the Mangai to Vaisele. It's not a far cry from there to Fanua, which tops our plantation. And then——"

"That naturally will facilitate trade."

Grant dropped back in his chair, with a laugh of one syllable.

"Will it? It will facilitate a bust-up, to my thinking. Diego is a very pretty overseer, and gets every inch out of his men; but his methods are his own. They mightn't commend themselves to squeamish stomachs. I don't call you squeamish; but I fancy I could tell you things that'd make you more than a little sick."

"Diego is a paying concern," said Haddington. "He may be allowed some license, Grant, as I have told you before."

"Oh, quite so. Labour is cheap, as the books show; and men are cheap. But Diego wastes 'em over much, to my mind. I don't object to cutting up an occasional malingerer for the encouragement of the others——"

"You and Diego have—ah—your own methods, as you justly observe. And you will please to remember that I do not care for such detail as is—ah—likely to be repulsive."

Grant nodded, grinning just a little. The overlord does not see the blood on his shekels, because he pays another man to wipe them first.

Fell a silence that was broken by quick feet scattering the gravel of the path, and Haddington looked up with a smile sleek on his lips.

"Kin, my dear boy, this is better than the sunshine. I am delighted to see you again; absolutely delighted."

"I knew you would be. I got in Tuesday night, an' I've been round seeing some men since. I've closed with Sleet an' Streatem for a series in the *Observer*, and Crick has offered me a sub-editorship. There are other things too—I wanted to see you about them."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure. You—ah—know Mr. Grant?"

"We have met before," said Kin grimly, and Grant's fingers went up to his throat. Some blue marks that Kin had put there showed yet on frosty mornings.

"Severne made many friends along our coast," he said. "There was a girl——"

"Klingenstien wants to bring out some pickings from any of our Australian rags he can make disgorge," said Kin, ignoring the other. "I gave him a free hand. It won't pay unless my book catches on. But he's game to chance it."

Kin had a purpose in marshalling his triumphs before these men. Since three shrivelled supple-jack berries in his waistcoat pocket commanded him to take off his

pride and let Haddington sit on it, he was not going to come naked underneath. He had brought sufficient credentials to prove that he did not intend to do less if the pressure should be lifted; but loathing of what he had come to say held him fast before sight of Haddington's narrow head and half-shut eyes. Three red berries on a tough stalk were earnest of all that he wanted of Life; and yet, pride dies hard in a man, and neither gods nor devils could have required of him a more bitter thing than this. Though, since it was to do, it were best to do it quickly.

He glanced at Grant with a tilt of the eyebrows that invited departure. Grant crossed a foot over his knee, and lit a cigar elaborately. He was obeying a silent order from Haddington.

"Your line of work is beginning to affect our fatty degeneration of loafers," he said patronisingly. "I like a chap to hit straight—and follow up. Over here they are talking of you as the coming man."

Back-patting from such as Grant stirred Kin more than a little. His breath shortened.

"I came here on business," he said; "and if you are the going man, Mr. Grant, I shall be happy to open the door for you."

Haddington's bloodless fingers went up to his bloodless lips.

"Grant is acquainted with all my business," he said suavely.

"Not with mine, though." Kin flung the door wide, and Grant laughed.

"When you tell Haddington, it becomes his business. When he tells me, it becomes mine. *Comme ça*. You may as well let me drink at the fountain head."

Kin turned to Haddington.

"I am going to see you alone. If you won't kick this man out I'll come again to-morrow. And if he is here

to-morrow I shall very probably wring his neck. But I am going to see you alone. Well?"

A man does not key himself to concert pitch that a five-finger exercise may be played upon him. Kin was here to face the music, and he wanted it now. Haddington moved nervously. He feared Kin, unknowing that Kin came fearing him.

"You can speak freely before Grant," he said.

"I will in a minute," said Kin grimly, and Grant laughed again.

"Let him have it, Haddington, before he blows the roof off. I'll go and wait in the garden. Shout if you want any help to turn him out."

"You have the most infernal cheek," said Kin in grudging admiration. Then he slammed door and windows, turned the keys, and faced Haddington with none to come between.

Haddington's pulses were leaping in his ears, and he sat still with an effort. This two-year compact had refined itself to the most primitive of all emotions. They hated each other as men only do hate through mutual benefits received and given.

"Your manners have—ah—improved since I took you off the shearing board, Kin. What is it you want from me this time?"

His cold eyes were narrowed to a slit. Against the flagrant sunshine the lobe of his ear showed coarse, giving the lie to the delicate face. Always Nature tickets the animal in man for those who know how to see. Kin saw; saw until his eyeballs went red and the sweat came out on his palms.

Through the scent of flowers and of Grant's cigar the very atmosphere was heavy with the pressure of brooding shame; and Kin writhed under it, drawing Josephine's memory to him for strength.

"My God," he said, under breath. "Anything but

this." Then he spoke, in the broad drawl of the old days.

"You remember that contract I signed you over at Frazier's?"

"Ah!" Haddington's face cleared, for he had got his cue. "Yes; certainly I remember it."

"I want to annul it—on conditions, of course."

"There was some talk of that at the time," inurmured Haddington gently. "I—ah—believe I told you that some day you might ask for annulment, and you told me——"

"Well?"

"That you would never ask."

The polite sneer stung as Haddington meant it to sting.

"There are circumstances—you can name your price, Haddington. I will——"

"It has no price."

"Everything has its price."

"Not this."

"That contract wouldn't hold good in court. I could break it——"

"At expense of your honour—yes."

Kin's head burned, and the corners of the room seemed closing in on him.

"I can offer a sum that'll be worth more to you than I shall ever be."

Haddington leaned forward, scratching his upper lip with a tapered forefinger.

"You did not speak this way once. You are—done, then?"

"I don't know," said Kin simply. Then the workman in him cried out.

"No! By Heaven, no. But—I have been ill, and there are other things. I'll do all that is in me, Haddington. It means more to me than you know. But I'll work better free."

"You will have the chance to prove that in a year's time—perhaps."

"D—— it! I want to prove it now."

A little cunning light shot the dulness of Haddington's eyes.

"I am afraid that is out of the question. I never—ah—go back on my word."

"Nor I. I tell you I'll do my very best."

"Your book that is on the stocks—is it your very best?"

"You'll see it when comes out," said Kin sullenly.

"Is it?"

"No."

Haddington shaded his face with the long fine hand. For he knew that it showed too much.

"Seven years' free work will repay my expenditure," he said. "I don't ask more of you than that, Kin."

Kin flung aside a chair and came down the room, and the elder man cowered from his face instinctively.

"Will you give me back that paper, Haddington? On my soul I swear that I won't fail you. I'll work through this year like a nigger. I'll work for you afterward. But I must have my life for my own."

The rowel was in Kin's flesh deeper than Haddington had ever hoped to see it. And the silence that followed was that terrible silence which has rung through all the centuries to prove man's hate to man.

"I saw a picture once," said Haddington softly; "and there were two gates in it. One was called the Gate of Eternal Demand, and the other was called the Gate of Eternal Payment. And those who passed in through the first gate had no outlet but by the other."

Kin neither spoken or moved, and Haddington said;

"Do you recognise the justice of that?"

Kin raised his shoulders slowly, as though a weight pressed them.

"Yes," he said. "Yes; you have the right. I would not have burked payment if it had been for myself only. That's all, then. I'll come when you call time. But—it's the public who gives the verdict?"

"By cash; not words alone. Yes."

Then Kin went out, and walked through streets and streets and streets, until the suburban trams roared outward round him, choked with homegoers, and the blurr of a smoky evening blinded him. He carried three supple-jack berries as pledge that he had taken the conduct of a woman's life upon him; and he slid his fingers into his pocket to feel them.

"I'd best go an' get drunk—if I can," he said.

And then a man pushed through the swing doors of a restaurant, bringing the hot smell of food to tell Kin that he was hungry. A band was playing something low and very sweet in the vestibule, and Kin passed it, halting at an empty table that faced the door. There were daisies in a vase on the table. Ox-eyed daisies, such as he had once pulled with Josephine on New Zealand hills. He sat down, drew one out, and fingered the petals gently. And it was so that Grant saw him from the doorway, and grinned, saying:

"Sentimental tack, is it? Then he was worth the tracking. But he will be a very brute to handle to-night."

He came through the room with his easy short step, pulled up a chair, and spoke genially.

"Crowded to-night, eh? Do you often come here?"

Kin straightened as though he had been struck.

"You will find room at the next table," he said.

"Plenty here for two." Grant flipped out his napkin, and beckoned to the prettiest waitress.

"Not for this two."

"We've been closer before now," said Grant carelessly.

Kin jerked back his chair.

"Will you go to another table?"

"Will you moderate your voice a little? You'll have an audience directly."

The clatter of knives and forks had lessened slightly, and a smudge of faces confronted Kin under the glaring light. He turned from them.

"Say what you have come to say, then, and get out."

"Don't kick up a shine—Haddington has told me what you wanted of him."

Kin made no sign, for he knew that Grant watched for it.

"Well?"

"Well; you're not a very tactful man, I don't think. A kid could have played your hand better. Why didn't you sing a bit smaller?"

Haddington had seared Kin that day until he thought all shame was dead. But it tingled again in his quick answer.

"I don't eat dirt to any man because he has a hold on me."

"I'd eat all Australia to the chap who had as big a lien on me as that old joker has on you," said Grant reflectively. "That is to say—if you mean to stick to your bargain. Do you?"

"Yes."

Grant leaned forward. When his eyes were hidden he was an ordinary youngster, with the narrow flanks and well-set head of the Englishman. But Kin knew the spirit that showed under the full lids.

"That suggestion Diego made you down in Upolu is still open," he said.

Kin put his knife and fork together.

"Do they breed many like you in England?" he asked.

"No," said Grant, unabashed. "I was schooled in

the Colonies. They taught me that money is the only thing a man can get back once he has lost it. That's why nine-tenths of us wait on it instead of on honour, and love, and the other perishable things. That is why I wait on Haddington."

"Then you'd best go and wait on him now," said Kin, and stood up.

"Hold on a minute. You don't know the little game yet, Severne. Haddington will damn your book if a man can do it—and he has the devil's own share of cunning."

"It will damn itself, I think."

"There you are, then. And you haven't got over that rip in your arm. I've seen the neuralgic marks in a man's face before now."

The band had slid into "Dolly Grey," and the quick-step of it blattered on Kin's heart. He sat down again.

"It's knockin' the life out o' me," he said, in sudden weakness. "I near got rid of it in the Islands, Grant."

"And you'd get rid of it there again. Don't be a fool, Severne. Haddington's got the whip hand, and he'll be bringing blood directly. There was a fellow called Julian—it's not a nice story—Haddington had the whip hand of him. Well; you lick Haddington's boots a little while until he thinks he has frightened you. Then get him to send you to the Islands, and we'll work in together. Diego's drunk two-thirds of the time, and you'd boss him all right. We're making pretty pickings already; but you—lor', I'd like to see you with niggers, Severne. You'd make 'em sweat—and not mess 'em up as Diego does either."

Kin sat still, with his hand clenched on the daisy flower. Across the water he was bringing Josephine's face to him, with its pure glad eyes and mouth.

"No," he said.

"It'd pay—well. We would work in together."

"No."

"There's a psalm we college fellows sang at Caius," said Grant. "We called it the gentleman's psalm, and I know two men who went through with it. They're both dead now. Are you going to be the third? It begins about a righteous man in the eye of the Lord 'who . . . sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.'"

And the lilt of the band went on—

"Hark! I hear the bugle calling.
Good-bye, Dolly Grey."

Grant bit his lip, seeing Kin's face.

"His own hurt," repeated Kin, under breath. "His own hurt."

"And changeth not. That's your password, is it? You'll whip the cat over it later, Severne."

"I won't come howlin' to you if I do." Kin got up swiftly. "That's the lot o' it, I think—"

"You haven't eaten a mouthful, man."

"If we'd been in Samoa," said Kin, "I'd have knocked the face off you long ago. Bein' in a restaurant in Sydney, I can only tell you that I'd starve before I'd eat with you again, you—"

He went back to his lodgings, and in the dark of the landing stumbled on a short-haired terrier that was dear to him in memory of Mr. Tubbs. He swung the little dog up, shut his door, fell on the horse-hair couch, and drew the forepaws onto his chest.

"It's been a stiff rack, Thomas," he said. "A stiff rack; and I'm not off it yet. What's to do, little dog? What's to do over it all? I kept my hands off Grant, an' I kept 'em off Haddington, too. But that's not to prove that I'll do it next time. And what shall I say when I go back to her?"

Thomas wriggled his nose into the armhole of the

waistcoat, and went peacefully to sleep. Kin stared at the dark until it pressed on his eyeballs, making pictures that hurt over much. Then he slid Thomas to the floor, struck a light, and sought on the mantelshelf for the tobacco tin. A letter in Dick's handwriting lay under the tin. It had come by the northern mail, leaving the red house probably six days later than Kin had done.

"We'll get the pipe going before we open it, eh, Thomas? Room for you there, lad? All right."

Thomas crawled over Kin's stomach to lick the hand holding the envelope. He quite understood that Kin had been fighting another dog, and that the other dog had gone home with its tail up.

"Just for the fun of the thing, we'll say we're afraid to open it, little dog; for it's not nice to be on a con-founded seesaw with a bump at both ends. Now, let us see if Dick is going to let us down light."

The two sheets sprawled with such broken apologies for backsliding as roused a fierce pity in Kin.

"For he's a better man than I am yet, Thomas. He put the spoke in my wheel, sir, an' I knew it. But I would have taken his money—much money—more than I could ever pay back——"

His voice trailed off, and he sat very still. Thomas put his head under the paper, and pushed it up; but for Kin the words were written all across floor and ceiling and the blank of the uncurtained pane.

"And Katty owned up to missing you too. The giddy old thing sent you some supple-jack berries by Honi, and she was wild when the little beggar said he'd never given them. All Maoris lie like the dickens, but I promised to ask if you'd got them. Three dried berries on a short stalk."

Kin sat until voices on the stair roused him. They belonged to the room above; and the uneven footsteps

that presently sounded over his head were as sods might be on the coffin lid of one who wakes over late. He pulled a folded envelope from his pocket, shook something out, and held it to the candle until the berries popped one by one, and the last fluff of the stalk burnt his fingers with the ash.

"It takes a woman to make a complete fool of a man," he said. "A complete fool—to the very last inch of the tether." Then his hands went out blindly, and he groped for something that was not there.

"Josie," he said. "Josie; I gave you all I had, dear—an' I gave you the rest to-day. Is there nothing left now—Josie——?"

CHAPTER XVIII

"I WANT HER ONLY"

"Jes' to speak a one word, alii—jes' to speak."

Kin swung round in the office chair.

"O ai le ingoa?" he said sharply.

The native made two steps across the door sill and stayed. He was young and well knit, with only the red of his lava-lava to cover his muscular nakedness; but the cringe of his body showed the white man's rule.

"Jes' Piloe, alii. Jes' the wife. She go seeck to die."

"What made her sick?"

"Diego. Him go give one fine seventy lashes—make Piloe one dam seeck."

Kin caught back the word on his tongue.

"I told Diego Piloe was not to be flogged again. When did he do it?"

"I not know. Jes' work one, two days at plantation; come in and fin' her. She make die. She make she want the Père—him up from the Beach."

Kin turned back to the desk, and wiped his pen. He dared not think of Père Eugène in these days.

"You niggers always think you're going to kick the bucket if you get a scratched finger. Where is Piloe—I'll see her."

"Jes' in the hut—by the well. She go die. She go want——"

"Rot! Malingering, of course. Get back to your work, Matua."

"She want the Père——"

Kin flung an oath at him.

“She can’t have the Père. A flogging won’t kill her. Get back to your work.”

Matua slunk away in silence; and Kin gathered up three account books and a ledger, locked them into the desk, and went out.

The very air was stupid with heat, and the bread-fruits hung their ragged leaves under weight of the sun’s rays. The glare of the white shell track burnt Kin’s eyes beneath the helmet shade; and through the ache in them the clumped huts in the native quarters seemed to reel and lose shape. High across the gleaming plantain leaves came the drone of workers toiling in the sugar cane, with the distant fret of the sea on the coral reefs to underline it.

“A—e—! The soft stalk for the knife,
And the forest tree for the knife also—o—!”

The drone followed him into the hut by the well, where the hanging mats swept the floor, shutting in a noisome dark. Kin jerked one away, casting an arrow of light to the farther wall.

“You there, Piloe? Ah, I see. Great heavens, girl——”

The parched brown face looked up at him.

“No scold Matua?” she said piteously.

“No; he all right. Diego him beat you, eh? Let’s see.”

He stooped, turning her gently. But she cried out with a sob, and Kin’s words came quick and harsh.

“When did he do this?”

“I—forget. The Père, he——”

Kin frowned down at the labouring chest.

“I think he can’t do much for you, Piloe.”

“He can show—make go die easy——”

“Ah!” There was a silence, shaken through by Piloe’s gasps. Then Kin rose up.

"You shall have him, Piloe. And I'll send Matua to you. No; don't be afraid, Diego won't beat him."

He went back to the house and gave three orders. The last one brought Diego, with his yellow mean face sullen.

"What is the Signor desiring?" he said. "I am busy."

By Haddington's will Kin ruled this man with his hands tied, and both knew it.

Kin sat quiet at the desk, and his hand was shut on it. But the steady compelling eyes held all the force that was needed.

"Why did you flog Piloe?"

"Why does one beat the goat's milk in the bowl? The Signor knows that the acid must be whipped out of it. There is the sluggish Maori blood in Piloe. It must be cut out of her."

"She works when she is fit. But she won't work again. You have killed her."

Diego began to roll a cigarette.

"I can get Matua a better wife," he said indifferently.

"You——" Kin checked himself. "There has been too much of this thing lately," he said. "I'm not going to write to Haddington about it again, but I'm going to tie you up and flog you next time I hear of you whippin' a woman. An' you can write to him afterwards if you like."

Diego's lips curled back from the discoloured teeth.

"You daren't——"

Kin lifted his shoulders.

"You'll find that out—if you give cause. That'll do. You can go."

"The Signor has——"

"You can go. Did you hear me?"

Kin sat without moving, and his voice was unraised. But the authority behind the words sent the other out

in silence. And then the tension dropped from Kin, and he flung his arms out on the desk, and laid his head on them.

Outside the window the chirping of cicadas was like the crackling of thorns under a pot, and the stagnant day with its sinfulness and sorrow lay weary on the workers in the brake and the bowed man at the desk. The heat had grown more cruel when Kin pulled himself upright, with the lines deepened on his face.

“Let him say what he likes to me,” he said. “I must see him again. Two years—nearer three. Has he gone greyer, I wonder.”

The stillness of the hut by the well was broken by the liquid run of the Samoan tongue. Kin knew the voice and passed in, baring his head. Père Eugène turned at the step, and there was no amazement in his speech. “You have been here four long months, my son, and—have you quite forgot the old Père?”

“How did you know I was here?”

“The beach has many tongues. I hear them all.”

Then, sternly: “You have seen this girl’s wounds?”

“Yes.”

“It is gangrene. She is dying. She has been flogged to death.”

“I know it.”

“And you are manager on this plantation?”

“Yes.”

The priest turned from him, and bent again over the dying girl. Kin sat on a rough stool, watching beneath his hand. The colourless pinched face was more sunken than in other years, and the old soutane fell looser about the bony limbs. But Père Eugène’s hands were very tender, and Kin saw, marvelling, the calm light in his eyes as he raised Piloe against his breast. It was a light in which Kin had no part, for it was born of peace.

Matua sat on the floor with his head drawn down to his knees, and rocked himself, muttering in undertone. Then Piloe spoke, and Père Eugène raised his eyes, looking without expression at Kin.

“Her child. Where is her baby? Can you bring it?”

Kin went out to the women clustered in the door-opening. They had come fresh from the fields, with the dust and sweat on them yet, and the blood from the overseer’s whip along their limbs. He spoke swiftly in the vernacular; and a slim brown thing with yellow flowers trailing in her hair darted away among the plantains, returning with a naked bundle which she thrust into Kin’s hands. Kin carried it in, stooped, laid the sleeping face to the mother’s breast, and drew the weak arms around it gently. And Père Eugène’s eyes softened, seeing.

On the floor Matua was rocking, rocking; and the women on Life’s side of the tideway whispered with little giggles in the sun.

“Again,” whispered Piloe. “Say it——”

“Peace,” said Père Eugène tenderly. “My peace I give unto you. Peace, now and forever more.”

There was a little silence. A silence charged with a greatness that made Kin shiver in the heat. Then rustles from the bed, and a sigh, and Père Eugène’s voice, steady and deep as a trumpet call:

“Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.”

The child awoke, crying, and the women came in; and Matau sat on the ground, rocking, rocking. But in Kin there was only a great weakness, and a longing for that passage which Piloe had found so short. Père Eugène touched him on the arm, and he jumped with a bitten-off oath.

“I have walked three miles,” said Père Eugène, “and it is very hot. Will you not invite me into your house?”

Kin led the way to his own private rooms, and brought cooling drinks. But the priest laid a hand on each shoulder, and forced him down into a chair.

“You will not tell more than you wish,” he said whimsically. “But I will ask—many things. Kin, my son, what has brought you to Haddington’s plantation?”

Kin kept his eyes down.

“That’s simple enough. I sold myself to Haddington, an’—he’s workin’ it out.”

“Sold yourself?”

“I’m not askin’ pity. You needn’t think it. If I’ve damned my life, that’s my own business. I don’t ask help, an’ I don’t ask pity——”

“No; I wish you did. The man who will not take pity from his kind will not take comfort either.”

“Comfort!” Kin pushed the hands aside, and stood up, laughing unsteadily. “Do I look as if I wanted comfort?” he asked.

They were both men who had seen souls in the raw agony that is born of a life self-broken. But it was Père Eugène alone who knew the healing.

“Tell me, Kin.”

“There’s nothin’ to tell. Failed—failed—failed—that is all. In everythin’. All my life through.”

“That is childish—and untrue. I know that you did not fail in your trust to Laleefa.”

“No. I wrote a yarn about her that would have made the critics sit up. An’ I burnt it. I’ve never done anythin’ so good since.”

“You burnt it? I am glad——”

“Are you? I’m not. I’ve wished I had it back a thousand times. It was a glorious bit of work.”

“The burning was better.”

“How——”

“You recognised a Lord beyond self.”

“More fool I, then! That’s what has—killed me.”

The priest took steady note of the hardened drawn face, and the bitter level of the voice, and the leaner limbs that had lost their eager strength.

"You are not a brave man after all," he said.

"Don't you think so? There is the saloon still down on the beach, an' the girls comin' up from Papeete—an' I slave for Haddington here, gettin' more kicks than ha'pence, an'——" He stopped, pressing his hands to the leaping nerves in his temples.

Père Eugène's heart was sick with grief and pity. But he knew that tenderness would have no hold with Kin this day.

"What has happened to the writing that was to make you famous?"

"I told you. I failed. The critics said my book was uneven—not convincing——"

"I know. I read it. You were learning too much to write just then. I saw the groping for truth in it. Well—you found the truth, and wrote better. Is it not so?"

"No. I've written nothing since."

"Nothing since! Why so?"

Kin's head was down in his hands, and he did not answer.

"Why so? Did the critics frighten you?"

"No. Oh, give it a rest, father. Go back an' do your prayin' for the beach. An' pray that I may go down there an' take my tot along with them; for that's the best medicine for all troubles. Devil knows why I don't do it now. I tried to stop Dick from drinkin' once—because someone asked me to; but I'd give a lot for the old chap's thirst now——"

"Kin," said Père Eugène, "God made man strong that he might fight—and overcome—and rejoice in his strength. You are young to have laid aside your armour."

“It was full of holes,” said Kin wearily.

Père Eugène sought for some anchor that would not drag.

“Then you are come here in fulfilment of that old offer made by Diego——”

This brought Kin to his feet, his eyes blazing.

“Is that all you know of me?”

“I know nothing of you now, except——”

“Well?”

“Piloë died in my arms just now, on the plantation that you manage. You know why she died.”

Kin walked to the door and flung it open.

“You are a priest,” he said. “That gives you the advantage. I don’t take insults from other men.”

“As before, you have but to say that you had no hand in it, Kin.”

“I won’t.”

“I will believe——”

“I don’t care what you believe. Will you go?”

Then Père Eugène went out, and Kin turned back to the monthly report that he was drawing up for Haddington. Down the plantain avenue the priest’s frock showed white where the dust lay on it, and his feet dragged heavily. Kin dug his pen in the inkpot with a sputter.

“An’ that will be the endin’ an’ the beginnin’. There’s not much that’s worth doin’ or undoin’, but if I choose to paint the beach red, Père Eugène, it’ll take more than you to stop me. You thought I’d done—that, did you? All right! I’ll do that an’ more, once I get properly going.”

It was a year and four months since Kin had burnt three supple-jack berries in a cheap boarding house in a Sydney back street. In the days that followed he frightened his landlady, and he frightened Haddington also. Grant once found him sitting in the little bare

room staring at the wall, and he went away and told Haddington.

"The fellow is badly chipped," he said. "He's clean crazy with neuralgia and starvation, and something or other has knocked the end out of him completely. You can use him how you like if you're cunning."

Doody wrote thrice, imploring Kin to send Dick some message. "For he thinks he has disgusted you," said Doody; "and he's likely to give up the fight altogether. He was better while he thought you cared."

Kin burnt the letters as he had burnt the berries, for he could not afford a fire in those days.

"Let Dick go to perdition," he said. "I don't care. He has lost her for me."

And he did not know that by his own act he was preparing sorrow for Josephine.

Then came the proofs of his book. Haddington found them a week later, piled untouched in a corner, and offered to correct them. It was for this that Kin put fear into him, and sat down and read the book through, with thoughts of Josephine tearing at him down every page. And later, the book came out, and the public handled it carelessly, for there were bigger things toward. And Kin came from hospital with the weakness of low fever hanging on him, to do Haddington's bidding according to arrangement.

Haddington was a clever man, and he recognised Kin's inability to play an underhand game.

"I am going to send you to Samoa in Grant's place," he said. "This will break you in to something better; and I can trust you to watch my interests."

Kin went, uncaring, with the old love for Père Eugène to hold him straight and his old pride to keep him apart from the priest's pity. But the day of Piloe's death put that away, and in the evening Kin took a horse and rode down to the village on the beach.

The back wash in Ah See's saloon was dirtier than of old; and if Grant came no longer to play with the Papeete girls, there were other men as ready, and as unabashed. Kin drank with the Methodist minister, and with Farquhar, and with many more, and staggered down to the shore under the moonlight to dance the hoola with the flower-crowned laughing girls. In four days he put Grant's memory out of sight, and made his own name such as the Kanakas giggled to hear. Along all the beach fresh evil bred, and Kin was to answer for more of it than he guessed.

The days and the nights were breathless and muggy, and there was sensuousness in the very scent of the flowers, and in the wash of the slow warm waves. Père Eugène went about and about; dealing with the spreading rottenness as best one man might do, and fighting Kin and the heat and the whole lazy sinful beach untiringly.

It was when Kin was beginning to grow very weary of all things, and the wires in his head troubled him with their everlasting tunes, that Farquhar and Duncan dared him to carry drink up the hill to Père Eugène. He took glass and bottle and went out, laughing foolishly, to stumble up the familiar track where Laleefa once ran light-foot. The night grew stiller and more peaceful as he climbed, and the solid glowing stars seemed dropping on his head. Far below the wash of the waves died in a ripple of moonlight, and the clean salt smell blew up to stir the great palms round the hut. Kin steadied his feet on the threshold, and blinked at the candle light, with the last fumes of whiskey dying in him. Against the wall where his own bed had been hung a rough-carved Christ on the cross, and Père Eugène knelt at the foot. Kin put bottle and glass on the floor. Then he said:

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“The beach alone is a big order for one man, eh, father?”

Père Eugène rose swiftly; and brought chairs, and the tobacco that Kin could not touch in these days; and he spoke easily on all things of common life, until Kin’s fingers began to twitch nervously and his eyes to wander.

“We need Laleefa and her companions,” said Père Eugène, then. “Do you remember the himenes under the palms, Kin? Happy little child She died for her love’s sake. And that is the highest of all things, you know.”

“The easiest of all things, you mean.”

“Sol” said Père Eugène, under breath. Then, very softly: “Dear lad; a harder thing was asked of you. Is it not so?”

The thin nervous arm came round Kin’s neck, and Kin turned to him, with the hunger in his face, and his words running wild.

“Father; I can’t live without her. I can’t! I can’t! It has taken my work from me, and my pride from me, and there is nothing left. I want her only. I want her—oh God, I want her so——”

“Yes,” said Père Eugène tenderly.

“I thought I could make her care. I couldn’t believe at first—I cared so much. I gave her all and——”

“I know, I know. Oh, my son—my dear lad. But though a woman be false——”

“No,” said Kin, drawing back; “she was never false. She never pretended to love me. I don’t blame her.”

“That is not true,” said the priest. “You blame her with every hour that you lead this life.”

“I don’t understand——”

“Are you not making her responsible for the life that you have ruined because of her?”

“I don’t know,” said Kin wearily. “I’ve gone past with it all now.” He dropped his face in his hands. “I

can't fight again, Père Eugène,” he said. “Don't try to make me fight any more.”

Père Eugène looked over the bent head to the Figure that showed in faint light on the wall.

“Ah, but I will,” he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LIGHTS TURNED DOWN

DOODY crossed the smoking room with an uneven step on the carpet, poured a two-finger nip of whiskey from the decanter that stood on the sideboard, and drank it at a gulp.

"I say——" began Dick, startled. Then he saw that Doody was shaking. "Mrs. Cunliffe worse?" he demanded.

"Yes. Finlayson says it'll only be an hour or two. I'm going back as soon as I've made up the post-bag. There are those cheques for you to sign."

Dick grunted, pulled the book toward him, and sought for a pen.

"Who's helping Finlayson?"

"Mac. But she's quiet now. Josie would stay in the room——"

Doody knelt one knee on the window sill, with his forehead pressed to the glass. A month back paralysis had suddenly sealed Mrs. Cunliffe's tongue; but until this day her whole body had fought the coming death. Now she would not fight any more. Dick frowned over the cheques. Dimly, he feared what Doody might say, and presently, without moving, Doody said it.

"Do you know where Mrs. Cunliffe's son is?"

"No."

"She will die now, and give no sign. She must have loved him more than she loved Josie. Do you think she is still afraid of his life?"

"Probably," said Dick shortly.

"Then I suppose—Pete is her nearest relative?"

"I suppose so."

Doody gulped, scraping his toe on the polished boards.

"Dick, we can't let her go to him—to the pub in the township."

"We can't help. She must live somewhere."

"If—er—if," stammered Doody; "it—it wouldn't cost much for Katty and her to—to live on here, would it? I know the place belongs to you, lock, stock, and barrel——"

"Jo doesn't belong to me. Have you got the envelopes addressed?"

"Does Pete want her?"

"Oh, hang! Go and ask him! I don't know, or care. Where are those envelopes?"

But there was a conversation behind Dick's anger that Doody did not guess at. Pete had begun it by saying:

"Folks say you'll let Jo live on in the old house."

"Might as well," said Dick; "no one else wants it."

"No. But I want her. She'd make a clinking barmaid."

"Would she!" said Dick, in wide disgust. "She won't come to you, Pete."

"She will—if she's nowhere else to go. She loves Honi more'n anyone except her Grannie." Pete leaned forward, pushing the whiskey nearer Dick.

"You can fix it so's she has nowhere else to go," he added.

"You be blowed," said Dick curtly.

Pete poured the whiskey, so that the smell of it rose in Dick's nostrils.

"Folks are saying you're drinking a bit much these days," he said casually. "You'd miss this snug little place when per'aps you feel rather snoozy, sometimes, eh?"

Dick looked round Pete's private parlour, with its cosy chairs and couches.

"Hum," he said. But Pete knew that he understood. There were many times now when it would not have been wise for Dick to walk down the township street.

Doody went over the river at twilight, and he answered Macintosh's question wearily.

"Dick doesn't know anything. But he won't let her live on here. You—you can't handle Dick much nowadays, you know, Mac."

"I ken," said Macintosh slowly; and the two went in together.

Josephine was stooped over the bed, with the rich brown of her cheek laid to the yellow ghastliness on the pillow. She lifted the helpless hands, kissing them, and pressing them against the warmth of her neck.

"Is it troubling you to think of me, dearest? Don't look so very sad, Grannie, dear. I'm all right, and I'll take care of Katty. Dearest—my dearest——"

The men looked at each other, and Doody came forward.

"She can't hear, Josie. She won't hear, or—or be troubled any more, dear. It will be all right for her by the morning."

But it was before daybreak that the end came, with neither speech nor movement to define the moment. Doody drew Josephine across to the window, and flung it open.

"It's better here, dear," he said; "and better than this for her."

Beyond the far-stretching tree boles the new dawn fluttered and moved in waves of pale waking colour. The air held a sweet wet warmth from dew-drenched shrubs and ferns, and down the hush of it a blackbird threaded his sleepy song.

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But Josephine turned from the living silence without to the stony silence of the bed, and her eyes were black with a great desolation.

"There is no one to look after any more," she said. "And no one to love."

Katty flung up her arms with a howl.

"Arrah, honey, me sowl; bhut ye will be destroyed wid the break in yer heart! Ah, wirra the day! The misthress! The misthress!"

Macintosh's hand closed on Josephine's shoulder.

"Ye hae her tae see tae," he said. "Theer is wark for ye, lassie. She lo'ed yer Grannie 'fore ever ye wur born."

Then he looked at Doody.

"Coom," he said. "Katty wull make her cry gin anyane can. An' that's the best for her."

A certain vivid perception of other minds was part of Doody's birthright; and it gave him the silence that Josephine wanted when he came that evening, to find her sitting on the verandah edge with her hands clasped round her knees, and her thick hair falling forward about her face. He sat down beside her, with the shattered jasmine blossoms raining over both as his arm jarred the stem; and the ghosts of the old verandah crowded round him as they were crowding round Josephine. Doody had loved the verandah better than any place on earth; and hated it better, too, when Kin was sprawled between them with his old pipe in his mouth corner, and his slow voice holding his hearers in an eager stillness as they listened.

Presently Josephine raised her head, and smiled at him with piteous lips.

"Thanks, Doody, dear," she said.

Doody's voice choked suddenly.

"If—I could help you, Josie——"

"You have—only—don't talk just yet."

In the next hour a mighty wind came from the gorge and the hilltops to set the big trees shaking, and Katty opened the door, seeking Josephine. She burst into the whole Book of Lamentations at sight of Doody, and Doody took her by the shoulders and shut her into the house. Then he turned to Josephine.

"Josie, I wouldn't say anything to-night; but to-morrow may be too late—I can't tell. Dear, I want you to know that if anything happens to—to trouble you, you have only to remember that with all my soul and body I am ready and longing to help you. Remember it, Josie."

"Of course I'll remember, dear old Doody. But—I don't seem to care to-night——"

"You may to-morrow. And then you will remember that I—I want to help you always, always."

Josephine laid her cheek to a burnt mark on the spot seared out by Kin's pipe near two years ago.

"Thank you, Doody dear," she said.

Then Doody went, anxious eyed and ignorant, to Katty.

"Would brandy be best for her?" he asked. "Or bread and milk? Something to make her sleep, Katty."

"There, now; I protest tu ye, if the beautiful big gintlemin wud come back——"

"You don't mean Severne?" said Doody, with a waking grin.

"Begob, then, I du. Who ilse, when he come sakin' her wid his intintions wrote over him plain as a poethry buke? Git out wid ye, that ye did not know ut!"

"What did she say to him? What?"

Katty knew all before. But wisdom suggested that since Kin were gone, Doody still stood for the picking.

"She sint him packin', I'se warrent, be the timper ov her that day. An' wud I not vow tu ye that he is a man wid a timper himsilf. Yes-s! I'se warrent!"

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"Then that's all right," said Doody in his throat, and Katty grunted as she got up.

"Ye're wise. We're ahl wise till we larn better. Ye wud be comin' tu see hêrself? Josie putt the flowers roun' her; bhut it's not a lovely corp she is makin', my poor misthress; Mary Mother, be swate tu her."

Doody fell on his knees by the bed; but he did not lift the face covering. For he had all Kin's imagination, without the workman's control of it.

"Let me help her, God," he prayed. "Me! Not Severne; not anyone else."

The next day that came which Doody had feared. He rode with Dick across the bridge, to see Pete canter down the cutting, hang his horse to the Cunliffes' gate, and pass in, drawing it to after him. Doody tightened the rein as Dick caught at his bridle. For Dick too had seen.

"Let me go, hang you," cried Doody. "It's Pete. He's gone to tell her——"

"Well; you knew he would, didn't you? Don't be a fool, Doody. She has got to know."

Doody drove in the spurs, and the plunge of Lilith nearly unseated Dick. But it did not loosen his hold.

"Not alone. She shan't go through with it alone. I tell you, I will go, Dick! Confound you! You can keep the mare, then!"

But Dick came down on the planking with him, and his voice was rough.

"Do you think she'd want to see you now, you precious young idiot? It's not a nice story, and I daresay she won't like it, and I daresay Pete won't tell it in the prettiest way possible. But she's got to hear it, and d'you think she'd like it better with an audience by?"

Doody climbed back to the saddle, and his flesh

tingled with shame that he should have wished to witness Josephine's shame. He rode with his head bent, for something lay new-dead. The something was Josephine's innocence; because the story of Dead-man's Hut as Pete would tell it must shake her beliefs to the core. Dick grunted, settling into the leather.

"Poor Jo," he said. "She did think no end of her mother."

Here Doody turned and raved at him, with his whole chivalrous heart racked and sickened, and the fear rising in him of all that the days were to bring. Katty feared these days too. She watched Josephine covertly through the long hours after Pete had left her, and flung up her arms with a "Praise Mary" when, just at sunset, she saw Josephine's blue bonnet pass down to the bridge.

"Ah, weary on the world," she said. "Ut is ahl throuble—tu thim that marry, an' tu thim that du not. Ah, honey, me darlin'; ut's yersilf an' Masther Philip du the sufferin'—more be rason that thim as brart ye tu ut is dead. An' why shouldn't they be, then? Faix! the mother on ye desarnes ut—Mary tache her her place. Begob; the sorrer is heavy on ye, Josie, acushla; an' ut is not the bhoy wid the blue eyes will iver make the bearin' light fur ye. Achone! 'Tis a silly kind ov up-inded world, whin ahl's said an' done ov ut."

Josephine crossed the bridge, and climbed the foothills beyond where Dick had burnt last autumn. Dead trees lay where the young grass sprang, or stood in gaunt nakedness to the sky. It was a battlefield where the strife had passed, and the slain were yet unburied, and Josephine brought her own battlefield to it in blind longing of kind for kind. She patted a great rimu that she had known when live ferns grew in its life.

"It was a hot fire, wasn't it?" she said. "Hot. Yes; but it's all right for you. It killed you."

A flood of daffodil pink washed over the hill, lining

out each stump in its individual death. The terraces were soft misty purples and wine red; and, far beyond the slate of the river, the lip of the sea quivered scarlet. But Josephine crouched unseeing among the burnt tangle of bush, until Mr. Tubbs found her, and called Doody straightway.

Doody came, with the nervousness red in his cheeks, and Josephine met him with her head up.

"You've no need to look ashamed," she said. "It's all true, then?"

"It is true, dear. But Josie—wait till I tell you——"

He drew her down beside him on the earth-loosed root; and at his touch tears came to her, shaking her with such fierce man-like agony that he could only set his teeth and hold her pitifully.

"Don't, Josie," he said. "Don't, dear. It's not so bad——"

"Not so bad! Doody, my mother! My mother! Do you know what she was to me? She was my religion I think—Doody—that box with the dresses and the veil. I thought they were my mother's. I thought she was—and you know! You know! She was a half-class Maori girl—a common servant. My *mother*. And she was—be quiet, Doody. I must say it, or it will make me mad. It has been making me mad all day—she left my father—and she left me, her baby. Oh, my mother! My mother!"

Doody had no healing for that sore. He waited until she said:

"I suppose you know the rest, Doody? But it doesn't matter. Pete says I must go and live in the hotel with him and Honi and Jin. He said Grannie knew it—and that was why she let him come so often. He was my relation. She hated him. She was pakeha all through, but I was——"

"No, by George, Josie; you shall not talk like that!

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Josie, my Josie; do you think anyone loves you the less because of that old story——”

Josephine's fingers plucked the dead roots.

“Down to the hotel,” she said. “The hotel where my mother worked. If it was good enough for her it is good enough for me. Pete said so. And I can't do anything else. I'm too stupid to teach, and I'm not strong enough for a servant. Doody, what can I do? —What can I do? Oh, if only I dared go out into the world by myself!”

“You needn't. Let me go with you. Josie, I know that you don't love me yet. But—but you could learn. And I could take care of you. Josie, I don't—I wouldn't take advantage of you. Just marry me, and I—I won't make it hard for you. I just want the right to look after you. Can't you trust me, dear?”

Josephine looked at him, with grave pitying eyes.

“Poor old Doody,” she said. “Poor dear old Doody. But I couldn't—I couldn't ever love you that way, Doody.”

“Love me any way, and I'll chance the rest. And some day, perhaps—you can't tell——”

“I can,” said Josephine, very low.

The world went black before Doody's eyes, and his words came with a rush.

“You mean—you love someone already? Not Dick! Don't tell me it's Dick.”

“Dick! How dare you, Doody! It's not anyone——”

“Then,” said Doody slowly, “it is Severne. Tell me, Josie; is it Kin Severne?”

“I won't! Oh, how dare you! Go away! Go away! Don't look at me like that! I don't care, I tell you! I don't!”

Doody stood still, with his face turned from her. For when a soul is called to tread the wine press no other

soul may know, lest the juice smear its garments also. Then his hands came over Josephine's, and he said:

"You mustn't mind my knowing, Josie. It is better. Now I won't bother you any more. He has—the claim. Can you tell me if there was a misunderstand—"

"There was nothing," began Josephine, rigid to her finger tips. Then the pain of her young heart cast down its reserve.

"Is he dead? Oh, is he dead? He hasn't come back, and Dick never speaks of him—and I couldn't ask. Doody, is he dead?"

"No, Josie. No, I don't think so. It would have been in the papers. He's got a bit of a name, you know."

"Then—oh Doody; why doesn't he come back? I sent him away, for I was angry, and I didn't know—but he said there would never be anyone else; and—why doesn't he come back to see?"

"If you sent him away—"

"But I wouldn't have been angry if I hadn't cared. Doesn't he know enough about women for that? Would you have stayed away if—oh, I forgot! Oh, Doody, dear—"

"Don't mind, Josie—don't. I'm all right. Don't ever think about that again. You think I would have come back? Yes, of course. And so will he, I expect."

"But you don't," said Josephine. "You don't, I know. You are thinking of his book."

Doody nodded, biting his lips. Kin's book was not the work of a man who had regard for love and for women. And the powerful cruelty of the master strokes hid the weakness of conviction for Doody.

"I—don't know much of him, Josie. I daresay he's an honourable fellow enough—I'm sure he is in all ways with a man—"

"Listen," said Josephine, standing up to face him in

the fading windy evening. "You think I don't trust him. You think he's not worthy to be trusted. He is. If he never comes back, I shall still know that he loves me, and I'll wait for him. He kissed me. Do you think he would have done that if he hadn't loved me above all things? I knew it at the time; but I was mad, I think."

The careless garbled story which Dick had once told of Laleefa rattled into Doody's brain, and the blood was hot in his forehead.

"Some men do, Josie. You mustn't go much by that. I—I'd have thought a lot more of him if he hadn't done it. He—may be all right, but—a kiss doesn't mean anything at all to some fellows, you see."

"Doesn't mean anything at all," repeated Josephine blandly, and her mind went over the words again. "Doesn't mean anything at all—to a man." And that whip roused her, for she knew what it meant to a girl. She looked Doody straight between the eyes.

"I'm going home," she said; "and you're not coming with me. I don't mind the dark. I don't know what you think of me, and I don't know what he thinks of me. And I don't care. That is all."

"Josie——"

"You are not to come with me, I tell you. Good-night."

Doody stood among the dead trees with Mr. Tubbs slobbering over his gaiters.

"Curse him," he said. "Why did he ever come here? Curse him!"

Josephine made a fire in the backyard next morning, and Katty, seeing the burning, cried out in crude dismay.

"Wisha, then, me honey darlint; is ut clane cracked ye are to be desthroyin' them lovely things that I du remimber when they was loik the shtars of mornin' "

for glory? Josie, that's the futshtool where the mistress kep' her feet—bedad, then, ye shan't——”

Josephine held her off.

“I must. I can't take them with me, and I won't leave them here——”

“An' why shouldn't ye, then? Wid the impty drawers through ahl the house achin' fur thim where moths du not shtale—ut is ahl in the sarvice buke. Begob, Josie—wid the shmell ov the butes goin' tu the sowls ov them as walks barefut——”

Josephine flung on a fresh armful.

“If I could, I would burn myself,” she said.

But a week later Macintosh offered to Josephine the means of doing this. And she did it. Dody heard third-hand, and dashed capless over the bridge, and up the cool avenue where the shadows lay. Katty was scrubbing the kitchen floor, and the mark of trouble was plain on her face.

“Where's Josie? I want her. Go and tell her I want her at once.”

“Dade then, there's no sinse in yer comin' here—ah, go home then, honey, fur there is evil on us, sure. Wisha, wisha; the day. Ah, the day ov ut!”

“It is true? But—she can't marry him. Why—why—you should have told her she can't——”

“Should I, begob,” said Katty grimly. “Git off of me clane flure wid the butes ov ye.” She slopped a sea of suds along the boards at him; then sat back on her heels and spoke. “She guv ould Mac her word chirp as a chicken; an' if the heart ov her was baten down, me honey jewel, ut is not me that wud tell ye ov ut. An' that's the lave an' lot ov ut. Gorra! if ye wud not bring the other man back ut is yersilf should be doin' the penance.”

“But I don't believe he wants to come back. I—think she knows it now.”

"Then ut lois tu yer own dure, an' the Hivins forgive ye. What? Du ye expec' she wud kape single wid the world pokin' the finger at her to say she is waitin' fur wan that does not want her? Yerra! Git out wid ye, an' foind her yersilf. Du ye consider I have nought tu du bhut sit down running afther her up that Jacob's laddher wid more broke rungs in ut than prayers will mend, an' a flea in me ear at the top of ut?"

"She's in her room, then?"

"Didn't I tell ye? Git out wid yer plaguin', ye spalpeen, or I will have the dinner shpoilt on me. Begob! Did I not tell ye!"

Before the smell of burnt milk Doody fled, to climb the ladder and knock on Josephine's door. At its opening he spoke without hesitation.

"Take me instead, Josie."

Josephine wore a dignity that put her far apart from the nervous boy.

"Dear old Doody, I care for you too much for that. Mac is old, and he understands. I am a coward—you will never know how much of a coward I am. You will not speak of this again, Doody. It is a very good match for my mother's daughter. And Mac loved my mother. That's all, Doody——"

"Josie; if he comes back—too late?"

Josephine's hands went up to her breast involuntarily.

"I know he will not come back now," she said quietly. "He thought lightly of me, or he would not—you showed me that. Please don't, Doody—I can't bear much more just now."

"All right," said Doody, very meekly; and went home in an aching doubt that presently drove him round the verandah and through the rooms that had once been Kin's. He passed into the writing den, shut the door behind him, and sat down in the chair at the desk. The personality of the man who had lived there

was awake and breathing in the stillness. The shelves stared with empty eye sockets where Kin's reference books had been; the worn track through the carpet middle shouted of him; each blotch of ink on the panelled walls told of its birth derisively. The Indian clubs stood prim in a corner. Doody had seen them last bringing Kin's muscles into play on naked arms and shoulders that held the dew of an early swim on them still. Almost, he heard Kin's voice, rough and forceful, as he battered Dick with some heterodox idea that was dominant and elusive as the man himself.

Doody dropped his face in his hands.

"Oh, God," he said. "Forgive me if I'm doing wrong. But if he is a man I must bring him back to her."

He found an old pen of Kin's, with the handle chewed half down; hunted out blotting pad and paper, and set down date and address, with "Sir" to flank it. Then a half-hour passed, and Doody dipped the pen again.

"I must get on with it. Let's see. How far—'Sir,' 'Sir'——" He wrung the sentence out, word by word.

"'Sir.—Remembering the interest you appeared to take in Mrs. Cunliffe while here, I thought you might care to hear of her death, and of the consequent change in her granddaughter's fortunes.'" Doody re-read this thrice.

"Couldn't have done it better himself. Er—I believe Dick told you that Miss Cunliffe was part Maori, though he had no business to. And if you've been placing her on a level with the Samoan girl we both know of, I beg leave to call you a despicable 'cad.'"

Here Doody got up and walked, with the vague presence that lingers in once-used rooms to daunt and harry him. His own love was under foot for the hour;

but his chivalrous fears racked him, driving him up and down until bodyache brought him back to Kin's old chair.

"I'll think of the rights of it when it's done. Now—'Probably you will be pleased to hear that Miss Cunliffe is shortly to be married to Macintosh, Dick's shepherd——'" Doody choked over this, then drove on with a splutter: "'For Heaven's sake, come back and stop it, Severne. You're the only man who can do it, and if you've a soul in your body you will. You know what Mac is—an old common Scotch labourer who a girl like Josie would go mad with in a month; and you know why she's marrying him, or if you don't you ought to. You know she loves'——'" Doody obliterated this with careful blots.

"I mustn't tell him that, must I? Er—'You can call me what you like for writing like this. I consider you should be called it yourself—and worse. I am telling you because—because'——God help me, Josie dear; I must tell him straight out. It's the only way."

The roses about the window flushed pinker as the sun sank westward, and their innocent faces suggested Josephine—the Josephine whom Kin might make for a byword in his books when Doody had done with her. Doody turned from them, and wrote.

"'However little you may desire or deserve it, I tell you, as man to man, that she loves you, although you needn't think she has said so. And how much you are to blame for it you know better than I do.' There! I've done it, and you would never forgive me, Josie. Then, what—ah—'If the few months you spent here have become merely a forgotten episode in a life of such episodes I apologise'—— After deliberation Doody added a second p—'apologise for thus treating you as a gentleman, and acknowledge my mistake. Yours——'"

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“Now,” said Doody, rubbing Kin’s old blotter over his signature; “I have done it, dear; and if you ever know——”

Then he put his head down on the desk, and cried as a woman might do. For he had given Josephine’s secret into another man’s keeping; and who was to say if the man should be worthy?

CHAPTER XX

THE YEARS THAT THE LOCUST HAS EATEN

PÈRE EUGÈNE looked down from his hut on the hill, and saw a riot of colour that glowed on the little pier. Scarlet, and soft blue, and buttercup yellow, and green, struck through by purest white; and he knew that it was the girls of the beach preening, as parrots preen in the sun. Behind them the sky was red-purple with the rack of a passing thunder storm, and the coral reefs dazzled in light.

“But what has brought them together at this hour,” said Père Eugène, shading his eyes. “I see no——” Then he whipped up his field-glasses in a sudden fear.

A fishing boat crept through the trough of the leaden waves, with a muddle of torn mast and sail on her quarter. Glint of spray in the sun, and the gleam of naked arms in regular rhythm told her obedience to the oars; and doggedly the rower held her, nose on, against the out-coming breakers.

“He has had a mishap in the storm,” said Père Eugène; “but he is a strong man, and clever, and the girls will show their approval.”

The rower brought the boat alongside the pier, cast the mooring rope, and lifted a man from the boat bottom. The colours fluttered like blown ribbons, and Père Eugène laughed, knowing what they would be at.

“They will take full toll—and here comes he through them—aie; running with head and elbows down as a

white man runs." He put down the glasses suddenly. "For most surely it is that lad of mine. What has he been doing?"

Kin came hot-foot up the hill; cast himself gasping on the grass, and chuckled; his broad chest heaving. The water ran off him, and his black head was sleek with wet.

"They kissed me," he said. "Every jack-man o' them. Shocking, ain't it? An' have you got a spare pipe and baccy, for mine are all in a mess wi' sea water?"

"What mischief have you been up to now?" demanded the priest.

"Just brought Simono in. Thanks. Don't know what possessed him to go out alone, for he's always sick when opportunity offers. I would sooner," said Kin—cutting tobacco slowly—"I would sooner take a stomache ache to sea with me than Simono. Well—when his mast carried away, and I saw he didn't get the oars out, I went along and suggested it. Wasn't far, anyway. Where did you get this plug, father?"

"Jacson brought me some of his special. You swam, Kin? And there are sharks——"

"He that seeketh," said Kin curtly.

Trouble showed on the grey wise face.

"Not that, my son. And—never the oblivion that you seek. Besides, there is work for you yet."

Kin gave no answer, and Père Eugène looked down on the stern lines of mouth and forehead.

"How goes the writing these days, Kin?"

Kin turned over, and took the priest about the hem of his cassock.

"Father, you don't know what you are making me do. I cannot. It is hard to get back the years that the locust has eaten."

"It is not so meant. But the crop of coming years will be the sounder and sweeter for the pruning."

"Not my crop," said Kin, with a half groan. "The locusts that died there fouled the ground. It will not grow anything again."

"Then you have let go once more, my son?"

"No—I keep on. But it is only for duty's sake."

"That is enough," said the priest quietly.

Kin sat up, with his eyes hungry and eager under the deep brows.

"Is it? Is it? I tell you it is not enough. It is not enough for any man. Listen till I tell you. I slave round the plantation all day; an' keep an eye on Diego, an' make out lists and accounts, an' do the million little little things that come over again eternally. And in the evenings—I get out my writing, and I grind away at it. So many words to a page—so many pages to an evening, and—I dare not read it over. And then——"

"Yes?" said Père Eugène, to draw the sting.

"There's the starvin' for the old days in me yet, father. I'll never lose it altogether. I want to be free—I want to be free. I could bear all things better if I were free to go where I wanted. I'd go back to the track that I sold my soul to get away from. For the work of a man's own brain and heart are just rotten flesh between the teeth; and the only clean meat is that which Nature gives."

"That is untrue," said the priest; "and you know it."

Kin laughed, drawing at his pipe in quick irritated breaths.

"What a lot of bother and fuss we make over things 'fore they happen. An' how little they matter. I was clean mad with pride 'bout my writin'—thought it was goin' to upset the world, and it has only upset

me. I was sick afraid o' what Haddington might do to me—an' he's only given me a billet that's not much worse than any other; an' I calculate he'll keep me a fixture here so long as Grant's bad leg keeps him a fixture in Sydney. An'—I thought I'd found a key that opened the outer door to Heaven, an' it was the latch-key into the Land of Emptiness."

"Your writing will fill it——"

"Never! Leave that alone, father." Kin got up and shook himself. "Time I was jogging, I reckon. So-long. See you some time next week."

"Diego is behaving better?"

"Better? Well, when he isn't raving he's maudlin, which is rather worse. I can't kick him out, and Haddington won't. But he's not the terror of the beach any longer. Do you remember what a factor he was when I came, years ago?"

"I do; I do, indeed. Good-bye, my son. And remember you always, that a true man fights to a finish."

"That's a nasty bit of barb-wire for a fellow to take to bed with him," said Kin, tramping away. "Just remind Pilao that he'd better turn up at the plantation in the morning, will you?"

Kin walked homeward through the glare of the middle daylight. In the forest with its fathom-high shade and its warm sleepy scents his feet lagged. But the step quickened again on the white-shell track, where his daily work met him and held him until the scant twilight was dead with all the noise from the native quarters.

Then he brought out pen and paper, lit a pipe, and tramped the room unevenly. The night air was cool after the day's heat, and the crisp plash of little waves on the shore far below sounded a peace that was not with Kin yet.

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"What's to do with it all?" he said. "What's to do?" He looked at the piles of poor scribbled stuff. "Do you think you can make me heed the rustle of a distant drum over again? That's dead an' done with. And instead—let's see some o' this rot."

He skimmed through a page, two pages; then ripped them through and through in a waking fury and pride.

"An' that's my work, is it? Mine! That's what I've landed up at after all. A man fights to a finish, does he? I owe you one for that, Père Eugène. I—Oh; if there was only a get-away from it all."

From the native quarters came the drone of the fields—

"A—e—e! The soft stock for the knife,
And the forest tree for the knife also—o—o."

Kin stopped suddenly. His hands came straight by his sides, and his eyes were set.

"There's that get-away always of course. But I'm not skunk enough for it yet. You've docked my games on the beach, Père Eugène, an' you've left me—what?"

The Southern Cross dropped down behind the hill, and a night bird called once and again. And through the creeping shadows and the breath of wind in the palms Kin dragged himself up to the chill calm of abnegation.

"I will put all that behind me. I will. I will. It's wastin' my life, an' I mustn't do that—for her sake. Do you hear, you who used to be first? I'll give all to you now. Not for my sake any more, or for yours. But for her's, though she does not care. I can give you much more than I gave at first, for—she taught me. I can give you very much now,

for I've paid full tale for the learnin'. Haddington said I'd pay with the sweat o' my brow. I have paid with the sweat of my soul. Is that enough? I will give you all that—if I can."

He got up at daybreak to spank and send homeward a brace of naked children who were fighting in the verandah. He gave judgment on a matter of petty larceny before breakfast, and signed to one of the hands the power to build a hut and bring a wife to it. He cut three hours from a woman's fieldwork that she might carry her sore-eyed baby to Père Eugène for liniments, and met a suspicious commissioner with a cool reserve that told nothing and sent the man away satisfied.

But beneath and behind the little things that choked the day to fulness tingled a something that he knew for the old lust rousing again. He had stood in an off-side holding so long, and his feet ached for the dust of the permanent way.

He wrote one page that night, shaping each word with carefulness and pain; and working as a child works at a lesson. A half-score times he cast down the pen in hopelessness.

"I can't do it. I'm done. I'm done. But——" And then he sought again for the cunning twist that had rammed his thoughts home in past years. Three nights he wrote, and read the sheets over. Then he went on, correcting weaknesses patiently, stumbling often, bringing his mind with the effort of dislocation from dead things that were not to be remembered. And slowly the flame kindled, never with the fierce triumphant passion of before; but steadily and clearly, refining the spirit that was bent and shapen by it.

At the month-end he took a little tale down to Père Eugène, and the priest read it through in silence. Then he put aside the sheets, and wiped his eyes openly.

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“Well, my son?” he said.

“It’s sound, isn’t it?” asked Kin humbly.

“You could draw blood once,” said Père Eugène
“Now,” he laid his hand on Kin’s neck—“now you will draw all your world by the heartstrings. You have purged your work, Kin.”

Kin grinned unsteadily, rubbing his forehead.

“Have I? Outside forces did that, I reckon. I’d have chosen an easier way.”

“There is no easier way. And one day you will be glad——”

“Give me credit for a little sense of humour, father. Glad!”

There was a flutter in the undergrowth, and the swiftness of light feet. And to Kin and the spare grey man it was the waters of time that had run back under the bridges to bring Laleefa again.

For the girl who cast herself down and took Kin about the feet, laughing and crying in a breath, had the supple brown limbs and the grace of Laleefa, and the scent of her crushed flowers was strong on the night.

Kin freed himself hastily.

“What is it, Taauma? What you do down from plantation this hour, eh? Me set Diego on to you, my word.”

“You go tell Pilolo he one marry Fifaga? You go tell him he not marry Fifaga. Go—now——”

“Why not? D’you want to marry him yourself?”

“No fear! My got ’nother boy. Pilolo owe one two twenty pound along my father. Him go marry, him no go pay up.”

“Shouldn’t wonder. You’re a business-like young lady, Taauma. Why you no get your father come tell me?”

“Him say the chief too big curser. I say, ‘No fear, when the Père same stop by him.’”

Kin looked at the priest over Taauma's head.

"You're givin' me away, my innocent," he said. "An' I don't see what I can do. Pilolo's the happiest man this side time. I can't take away his permit."

"He one big cheat," remarked Taauma. "My father go say you no let cheat."

"Like his cheek to say what I will or won't do. Why did he let Pilolo owe all same so much money, eh?"

"Pilolo want go buy house—buy wife—new clothes some more."

Kin sat down.

"Well, I am blest," he said.

Père Eugène laughed.

"You'd better have both men up, and settle all things in the morning, Kin. Don't let the girls come into it."

"These folk do beat all," said Kin, rubbing his hands over his head. "Seems to me Pilolo's in a tight hole, too. Well—I'll see about it to-morrow. You go wait, Taauma; all come along home with me. No like my girls come play down here at night."

Père Eugène's hand caught Kin's in a man's grip.

"That is it," he said. "Haddington's plantation had the worst name along the coast, and I—I could do nothing. But the welfare of these people lies to your hand, my son."

"Responsibilities," grunted Kin. "Father, I've shirked responsibilities all my life, an'——"

"You've a big one to grapple with there," said the priest, and his thin lips twisted as he looked at Taauma. "Take her home, my son, and may the wisdom of the serpent be with you in the morning."

"Faith," said Kin, shrugging his shoulders; "but I'll need it. Come up along home, Taauma. It go get late."

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Père Eugène sat long, a blacker shadow in the night, and looked down on the village where he had spent himself, faithfully, as a man should.

"To serve," he said. "My God; is that alone comfort and peace? May the reward come for him in part on earth, as it will never come for me."

On the tenth night following Kin came up the hill with a great light in his eyes, and the lilt of triumph in his feet.

"She wants me," he cried. "Father, do you understand? She wants me! I am going to her——"

He leaned against the lintel, panting as though he had run fast; and his hand shook. A new vigour rang through him, and the priest said anxiously:

"My son, you have not been drinking?"

Kin flung back his head, and laughed as Père Eugène had not heard him laugh yet.

"No fear. It's down in black and white. She wants me, an' I am goin' to her. Do you know what it means? It means that she has loved me all the time—is there anythin' in Heaven better than this?"

It was the turning of a knife in a raw wound; but Père Eugène's face showed it to the blank wall alone.

Then he gave sympathy and love in generous wisdom, until Kin said:

"That's enough, father. I—I was clean mad, I think. Now, we'll talk business. I'm going in Murray's tradin' smack to-night, an' I'll come back next boat. I'll get Currie to keep an eye on things—his plantation joins ours; an'—I'll bring her back with me. I say; don't look like that. I've got to talk some sense."

"Kin, are you right to bring her here? You are not freed."

"She shall choose," said Kin joyously. He caught the priest's wrists in hot hands. "I'm not afraid o'

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anythin' now. Life can't go wrong again. It can't—
with her. She loves me. That fills up all the world.
Father—I've been starvin'——" He bowed his head
suddenly, relaxing his grip. "Give me a God-speed,
father, for truly I am humbly grateful."

And Père Eugène gave it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

MACINTOSH staggered out of the shed, shaking the sweat from his hands and head, and Doody paused where he counted the sheep in the pens to say:

"Hot enough for you, Mac?"

"My faith," said Macintosh, and leaned on the rails, mopping his neck; "is it hotter in a Liner's furnace hole, I waner! I hae fillit oop for the day's wark, an' warstled wi' the press betune whiles, an' gien the boss a hond wi' the bale brandin' since I tasted the air last."

He pushed back his wide-awake, rubbing his red handkerchief across the grizzled head and hard Scotch face, and Doody looked away from him.

"Didn't know Dick was in there," he said.

"He's branded fower bales richt, an' a pickle moor wrang. Cammell is sortin' them. I'll awa tae th' hill abune the Deadman's Hut, an' gie Hairry an' Rock a hond doon wi' the ship. Ye can mainage here?"

"Yes. You told Nancart about that little unbranded lot? And Jack will clear away the ewes from the house paddock? Right. I can manage, then."

He flung open another pen, and let the sheep past, keeping a quick eye glancing for cuts; jotted down the score, and went on to the next. Dick came out with his florid face purple, and folded his arms on the rails.

"The worm of that blessed old press is giving out," he said. "We must get a new screw, Doody."

"Twenty, twenty-one—all right—shut up a minute, Dick——"

"Doody! Holy Powers above! Doody——"

Doody slammed the gate shut, and came to him over the rails. He had learned that it was better to be swift when that frightened note rang in the voice.

"See!" cried Dick, grasping his shoulder. "Down by the stable. I saw him! I saw Kin. Doody, don't tell me I'm going off my head again."

Doody swung round sharply, and stared keen-eyed through the run of heat across the paddock. Then he steadied his voice, and said:

"All serene, old chap. It is Severne. Would you like to go and meet him, Dick?"

"He—he wouldn't speak to me now," cried Dick, whimpering. "I'm afraid. Go an' tell him, Doody—tell him—you know what to tell him."

"I know, poor old chap," said Doody gently, and went out over the dried dusty tussock.

Kin brought his horse up on its haunches, and his words came sharply.

"Where is she? Not——?"

"No. Not married until next week."

"Where is she?"

"She said she was going on the beach this morning—Severne—wait——"

"Let go! I'll speak to you afterwards. Let——"

"There is Dick, first. He's waiting for you."

"I don't want to see him," said Kin behind shut teeth. "It's his doing."

"You're still more to him than anyone in the world," said Doody. "Nothing will give him pleasure or pain very much longer, the doctors say. If you could go and tell him that you're sorry——"

Kin jerked the rein away from the boy's hand.

"You're always messin' with other folk's business, Doody," he said, and rode past.

Doody saw Dick run, stumbling, with outstretched hands. He saw Kin drop from the saddle, and fling an arm round the bowed shoulders. And he trudged back to his work with the bitterness of death on him.

When Kin had gone up the bridge road at a hand gallop, Dick crossed over to Doody, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

"S-same dear old fellow," he said. "The best friend ever a man had, Doody, and don't you forget it. To—to think o' his talkin to me now. You know what I am now. Ev'body knows what——" his thoughts changed, and he smiled weakly. "I'm going in. Kin'll be back directly, and he'll want his writing. Is his room quite tidy, Doody, an' is the ink d-dried in the pot?"

Doody stood still, with the roar of sheep battering into his brain, and weighing him down. He had given to Josephine all the love a man may give. He had given to Dick that which is so much more than lip and eye service; tending him through these years as the woman who loved him might have done. And Kin had come, in the dominant strength of old, to sweep all aside, and to take his will of both.

The man with the branding-iron called, and roused Doody to knowledge of the glare on white clumped bodies, and the reeling dust, and the stench of sheep, and the noises that began with the cry of an unweaned lamb and ended with the roll of the sea.

"Yes, of course. What is it?" he said, and took up the threads of the life about him with firm hands.

All across the yellow of the hills and terraces, and all along the young green of raupo in the flats, the sunshine was vivid, and the smell of the spring was strong.

Kin rode where the yellow parrot beaks of the kowhai scrub pecked his shoulder, and the white plumes of manuka flower swayed at his knee. The sea was blue and deep as a baby's eyes, and the wet rocks struck back all colours to the sunlight. Up the shingle where it spun out to the hoof-stroke; across the dark smooth hardness of sand; round the sheen of rocks where the little waves whispered; and there, among the pools that were all rosy with sea anemones, he found her. She sat with her hands round her knees, looking out to sea, and the breeze was touching the loose hair where the back-fallen sunbonnet showed it.

He tied the rein to a driftwood tree, crossed three pools and a stretch of granite, and stood beside her. But he did not touch her.

"Josie," he said gently. "I've come back, dear."

"Kin!" she cried. "Kin!" and came to her feet with her hands outflung, and a very glory of gladness on her face and in her voice. Then the shadow smudged it. "Don't," she said, with stiff lips. "Don't—come near. There is Macintosh——"

"Macintosh!" Kin laughed gleefully. "Leave me to settle Macintosh. Is that all?"

"I have promised him——"

"He'll give the promise back. I'll see to that; if you want it back. Do you—Josie?"

She pulled her bonnet forward, hiding her face. But the crinkles of sunny hair showed yet and Kin's fingers itched to touch them.

"Do you, Josie? I've come from Samoa to do it, Josie?"

She held the rock with both hands, and her words were broken.

"Kin—oh—if you care—if you care for me still. You know——"

Kin was sorely tempted; but he stood back from her.

"I know that I must see Macintosh before we go any further. An'—I can't wait—much longer. There's one thing first. Listen, love. If it's to be me instead of Macintosh you may have trouble to go through later. I don't know—but it may be so. An' so you must choose between us. Now, for always, Josie."

She glanced at him then, with a flash of wet eyes and mischievous lips.

"I'll tell you that—when you come back," she said.

"Then——" Kin turned away; but her cry came after him.

"Oh, I mustn't—I mustn't. I promised him. He's been so good to me. And next week——"

"You will leave all to me, now, Josie. You belong to me; only to me. I'll handle your promise all right, dear. That belongs to me too, you see. I will answer for it."

On the bridge Kin met Doody again. And this time his question was:

"Where is Macintosh?"

Doody told him, and added: "There's fog up there. Look out for the swamp."

The dust of the day was white round his drawn eyes and his mouth, and he trailed behind the bleating sheep in the patience of a man who walks a beaten track with no end to it. Kin stooped in the saddle.

"I couldn't have done it, Doody," he said. "Will you shake on that?"

Doody's hand met his in a hot nervous grip.

"You can fix it, you think? Mac's a hard one to tackle. He won't give her up——"

"Won't he? To me? Faith! I think that he will! Doody, poor old lad——"

"Don't! You'll be good to her?"

"Good to her! To Josie!" Kin laughed, struck

the spurs home, and raced up the cutting with a whirling dust-devil behind him.

Doody whistled up his dogs, and laid the nose of the van on the rising track cunningly. The dust was hot and sticky on his eyes as he rubbed them.

"Well—you wanted it," he said, half aloud. "What's wrong? You wanted it."

Pete stood at the bar door with Honi, and Kin flung a reckless greeting as he passed. The sharp bite of the air was an intoxication, and the power of the bulk between his knees made him defiant in a strength beyond his own. The hoofs ripped out the moist earth on the flat, sending up a smell of clean freshness; and on the hill beyond the big green crickets bobbed about him, singing.

Below, at his feet, the old mine field lay dead. It was grey with crawling mist-fingers, and cold with the chill of the damp. Kin rode through in a silence, as a shadow might ride in a land of shadows. The ferns were more lush under foot, and the lawyer and convolvulus clung closer round the spires and pinnacles. Kin slashed a nodding thistle head on a column as he passed.

"You've had your day," he said. "All that is old has had its day, and Macintosh has had his. And where will I find him to tell him so, I wonder?"

White manuka flower gleamed through the fog, and Kin beat up among it with the wild honey-harsh scent on its lips, and the wet making trelliswork across his eyes to hide the little hut. Up, and still higher, until the strip of road beside the hut lay white and naked, and Kin's hack stood on it, shivering and neighing at the nearness of some other horse unseen. Kin sat and waited: three minutes, five, then through the mist a big cloaked man rode out with formless dogs at heel. Kin spoke, and Macintosh tightened the rein with a gasp.

"I've got something to say to you, Macintosh," said Kin. "Come into the hut. It's darned wet out here."

Macintosh rode close. His eyes were red under the shaggy brows, and the fog lay on his stooped shoulders.

"What has brought ye back again?" he demanded.

"That's what I've come to tell you," said Kin coolly. "You don't mind waitin' a few minutes, do you? Oh yes, I'm goin' to say what I've come to say, so you might as well have it under cover."

The crazy door fell open as always, and Macintosh led the way in. Kin noted the stoop that is hallmark of hill-born men, and the loin stiffness that comes from long hours in the saddle. He shut the door, and put his back to it. Every nerve in him cried pity for Macintosh, but his words were scant and straight.

"I suppose you know what I've come for? It is just you and me for her, Macintosh. An' it is not you she loves."

Macintosh's hands hung down. Kin saw them close slowly.

"I ken what ye've coom fur?" he said, paying each syllable out grimly. "Ay, I ken. I ken yer kind wi' ane o' her birth. Div ye think I didna see't wi' her ain feyther an' mither?"

"You'll explain that, please," said Kin, very quietly. "What would one of my kind do to such as—her?"

"Mak a plaything o' her, whiles—an' weary o' her. Her mither was o' my class. Lat Josie coom back to my class, an' no go seekin' ane abune her. I am mate fur Josie; not sic as you."

"Now you're talkin' rot! I above her! Good——"

Macintosh put that aside with an impatient hand.

"Hae walls sic as these no speakin' for you tae hear? I thoct theer wisna a king that Arnie cudna mate wi'. An'—ye see! She cam back tae a mon o' her ain class."

Kin's eyes commanded the hut. It was sixteen by seven, with a nine square inch window to light it. A bunk with sacking bottom ran along one wall, with a candlestick of twisted fencing wire stuck in the sods above. This carried a guttered candle still, and there was spilt tallow over the unplanned board below the window. Rubbish of old boots and paper lay on the earth floor, and birds nested in the chimney corner. Beneath the bunk was litter of clothes, ripped up by rats. Assuredly the man who had lived there was a man of Macintosh's class. By the greasy bunk-edge, by the mildewed pictures on the wall, by the coarse and broken tinware Kin knew it. And for such as he had Josephine's mother left home and her honour.

Macintosh's breath whistled through his teeth. He kept his eyes on Kin.

"Ye see," he said.

"I don't," said Kin coolly. "Josephine is not as her mother was. She is half a Cunliffe. Don't be an old fool, Mac. It is you who are seeking to mate too high."

"I saw him deid wi' his bluid rinnin' in a pool whaur yer feet tread the noo. I saw her—ayfter. Her, wha hed seed it a'. No wunner she failed frae that day. I saw, an' I said nocht. Fur what was theer tae say? Has that durestep no speakin' fur tae tell ye that kind maun aye mate wi' kind? An' you, wha wud be castin' her bluid oop agin her, maybe——"

Kin made one step.

"By all things," he said, "I'll cast your blood up against something in——"

"It's fell easy tae talk that way," said Macintosh, unmoving.

"What would you have, then? I love her! Do you think I would tire of her? I? Do you think she would tire of me? I'll chance that."

"I doot ye wull," said Macintosh drily. "She has

gi'en me her ward, an' she maun keep it. Ay, though she cursit me for it I wud hauld her frae sic as you."

"That's madness," said Kin. "And it's an utterly untenable position too. She'll marry me, let you say what you like."

"Wull she? Then it's little ye ken o' Josie."

Without, the mist slid thin fingers through the cobwebs on the window, and the horses coughed, shaking stirrup and bit. But within the darkened hut Macintosh's grizzled head and storm-beaten Scotch face showed grey and unchanging as Kin answered him.

"You will give her back her word, Macintosh, because she loves me."

"I wull no gie it back—juist for that reason. What div I ken o' ye? Nocht but that ye air wild an' hot-bluided, e'en as her feyther wes. I wud no hae a' that ower agin. I lo'ed Annie too weel fur that."

"Then—you don't love Josephine?"

"I lo'ed her mither," explained Macintosh simply.

Kin hesitated. He read the clumsy tenderness that sought to shield Josephine from her mother's sorrow, and he read the coarse-fibred brain that could only be met with like coarseness. Then he used a weapon that was forged in cold deliberation, and that brought Macintosh upon him, shouting inarticulately. Kin held him off.

"The blame is yours," he said. "We loved each other, and who are you that you dare to keep us apart?"

"Ye wud gang awa—gin I marriet her——"

"I would not."

Macintosh's eyes showed red, and his breath came in gasps.

"Gin I thocht that—I wud pu' the throat oot o' ye."

"You are rating me no higher than the man who is a murderer. You are rating her lower than her mother. Well? What do you expect?"

It was the utter mercilessness of the eyes that cowed Macintosh.

"I wud hauld her safe. I wud mak her happy. I cud tell her o' her mither—much—so much o' her mither. Gin ye'd gang awa—I'd tend her fine."

Kin laughed.

"And do you think that would make up? I tell you, Macintosh, I would put you an' myself down in the dust for her to wipe her feet on. I'd—do all the foolishness under the sun—but it is I to do it. Do you understand?"

Macintosh sat on the bunk edge, his face sunk down in his hands. "Gin ye will—I'm no strang eneuch fur ye—I'm fearit;—I doot ye're a sinful mon—an' div ye no think I lo'e her——?"

"Not as I do."

"Ye can prove that, can ye?"

"You doubt her," said Kin, sternly.

Macintosh lifted his eyes, then he writhed.

"I wes——" he began.

"I tell you this," Kin spoke quick and rough; "because she means all that is pure and dear to me, I'd have cut my tongue out before I said what I have said if there'd been another way out. But you've given your word now, so that's done with. And you—are you fit to think of her? You, who believed it?"

Macintosh looked at him. The sunken jaws showed through the scant red beard, and the faded eyes held pain.

"Mebbe ye're richt. I dinna onderstand. Theer wes Annie, ye ken."

Kin's sight blurred suddenly, and the fall of his hand on the bowed shoulder was pitiful as Père Eugène's.

"Yes, of course, Mac, I'm sorry—but you can't stop this now. It has gone beyond, beyond you; it has gone beyond us all. You can only make harm if you interfere. And most truly I will be good to her."

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“Gin ye wur o’ her ain class—I thocht ane o’ her class wud be better—well; it is no tae my bond ony mair—eh! Pooers sauve us!”

The strong hand on his breast sent Kin back against the wall. There he righted himself with a flash of fury.

“What the devil——”

“It was the cross,” explained Macintosh, half-abashed. “The shadow o’ the bluidy cross fallin’ over ye.”

Kin looked to the window. The mist was red in sunlight, and the faulty glass caught the refraction, lining out a four-square cross on the pane.

“Yes; curious thing. But there’s no shadow from it, Mac—couldn’t be.”

“It wes theer. Bluid-reid on yer breist. Plain I saw’t, like the priest had juist wrote it.”

“Oh, well. It won’t do me any harm, I guess. Mac, I’m goin’ back now. An’—what word do you give me to carry to Josie?”

Macintosh looked away, and he spoke slow and distinct:

“Tell her that I wud o’ hauldit her fur her mither’s sake. Tell her I gie her oop fur her ain. An’ it is yersel wha wull answer fur the richts o’ what I hae dune when Judgment cooms.”

Kin nodded, opening the door. The battle and the victory had made his head ring with lawless exultation.

“Faith, Mac, you’re a wiser man than I thought you,” he said. “But remember that I’m not taking up all your liabilities.”

CHAPTER XXII

WILL IT BE TRUE TO THE END, I WONDER

OF ALL the unorthodox wives a chap ever had——” began Kin.

Josephine stood up, unabashed, and pushed her hair back with a sandy hand.

“Will you hear to him, then? It’s Bluebeard he is; no less. Oh, come and paddle too, Kin. Do! Do! It’s the loveliest shelliest sand to wriggle one’s toes in. I tried to persuade Père Eugène just now——”

Kin laughed, throwing back his head.

“Don’t you! My faith, Josiel where would his prestige go to if the beach saw him tuckin’ up his cassock an’ paddlin’ round with a graceless young——”

“If you call me names,” said Josephine, “I shall set the babies on you. And they’ll make your legs very wet when they hug you. Are you going down to the village, Kin?”

“No. Just been there. I’m goin’ home. To work. To work, madam, while you——”

“I’ll come too if you want me, Kin.”

“I don’t.” He took her face in his hands, and kissed it. “Play with the babies all you want to, dear. Ugly little porpoises they are, too.”

“Oh, they’re not. Wait—Kin—I wanted to ask you——”

Kin set a slippery, crowing baby right side up, and came back to her.

“Well, dear?”

“There are so many children down in the native

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quarters, Vaimuina says. But I only see those that belong to the house. You told me I mustn't go down to the quarters, Kin——”

“And I tell you so again, Josie.”

“But I want to. Vaimuina says——”

“She has no business to, then. You play in the sun, Josie, an' let the native quarters alone. There is much there that isn't fit for you to see.”

“You see it.”

“I'm a man.”

“You've said that before—some centuries ago. And there are women there——”

“Not for you to have to do with, Josie.”

“Oh, Kin; that's all wrong. I'm not a child——”

“Aren't you? Look at yourself.”

Three quick steps took her up the beach, where she let the length of her dress fall to her feet. And the brightness of her brown face was dulled.

“If that is all, I will be old again. I was old when you brought me here. But I had forgotten—all that——”

“Forget it again, dear. I didn't mean that. It's just—you're the very sunshine itself, an' I don't want you clouded.”

“Kin, you silly old darling, it wouldn't hurt me; truly, it wouldn't. Père Eugène says you do lots of good along the beach, and—'An' why shouldn't I, then?' as Katty would say.”

“No reason at all. But why shouldn't I too?”

“Because—because——”

“I'll ask Père Eugène, then,” said Josephine with decision. “And that reminds me: I had a letter from Katty this morning. She says Dick needs all the tendin' ov a wet candle wick, sure's I'm tellin' ye, an' then Mither Doody's lightin' matches on ut all the day through.”

“Poor old Dick. But he's no one to blame but

himself. No—all right, dear; I won't say that. There's misery enough in the world, God knows, without sheeting every man's crime home.”

From the breakers a naked totterer called Josephine in frightened splutters, and Kin laughed, taking the steep way to the house with a whistle on his lips. Simono met him to give voluble misinformation concerning the mare's ricked shoulder; Diego brought complaint of a field hand; and from the potato patch came Baso, howling in three dialects, to cast himself at Kin's feet. Kin lifted him by the scruff of the neck, extracted explanation and a bee sting, daubed him with Reckett's blue, and handled the next plaint and the next with like swiftness. Then he dropped into the cane chair at the trellised verandah end, and mopped the sweat from head and hands.

“An' now I'll get through a bit o' paper talkee—if I can find my things. Looks as if Josie had been tidyin'. Bless her; she's even washed the inkpot.”

He sought for the tail-end of a short story; brought it out of a review that he had read in a lazy hour; lit a pipe, and fell to work eagerly.

The vines across the trellis made netted lines on the page, and a big red-and-yellow butterfly spread itself on the table edge. Through the warm peaceful stillness came the tuneless song of Simono as he curry-combed the horses, and very faint and far-off laughter of Josephine and the children beside the crooning sea. Kin lifted his head once, and his eyes were full of unrest.

“What more should a man want this side o' Heaven,” he said; “or the other, either, for that matter.”

Then his mind closed again on the stinging truth of the thing under his hand. Always, he would be a merciless writer, lining out the good and the ill with virile unfeeling strength. But softer fingers had taught him to feel for the strings of the great world's heart;

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at first blindly, and now with a tender wisdom that drew and loosed them as he would.

Two wasted years had washed his name down the tideway into the Pool of the Forgotten. Four months had poured it back, full flood; and when men spoke Kin carried the word down to Père Eugène.

"Read that," he said. "And that. An' Josie's worn holes in this one, I think."

He grinned, leaning against the lintel where the moon shadows made patchwork; and Père Eugène stooped by the lamplight, turning the letters in quick bony hands.

"Fills the bill, doesn't it?" suggested Kin presently.

Père Eugène came, laying a lean hand on each shoulder.

"You are contented now, my son?"

Kin moved restlessly.

"I should be—I am, generally. But—this is exile. Even with her it is exile. Father, I want the old old life—an' the smell o' the mulga scrub an' the guns. And—there are times when my hands just ache to be in wool again. Can you understand?"

"Understand? Yes," said the priest in his throat; "I understand. No man can kill nature, although he may curb it. But—you paid blood money to get away from that old life, my son."

Kin looked straightly at the elder man, and something of a childlike trouble was on his face.

"One always wants something more. Is all the world achin' for what it's given up, or can't get? Someone said—I saw it in a dedication somewhere—'For about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are cryin'. His heart remembers how.' It makes me sick o' times to think of the magpies on a clear mornin'. And yet—she is more to me than all the earth. An' I'm makin' her happy. What more should I want?"

“The world is always crying out. It will cry while time is. And always you shall hear it. That is the price of your knowledge, my son. But you will keep it from her—the little one? And—what of Haddington these days?”

“I don’t know. He lies so still that he’s either sleepin’ or hatchin’ some devilment. Each mail I send full particulars of what’s goin’ on, an’ pray for power to kick out Diego. Each mail I get three lines back: ‘Pleased to hear that I’m conductin’ affairs on such a satisfactory basis. Hopes the banana and taro crops will be good. Yours faithfully, ——.’ So I let it go at that, an’ I jog along—though, faith! Josie turns it into a cakewalk often enough. Father, she wants to go and mess round the quarters now.”

“Let her,” said the priest. “Let her do it. Give her a full life, Kin. You must not teach her to empty her heart on you only, for you know not what time and Haddington may bring.”

“No; I suppose you’re right. An’ nothin’ will knock the sunshine out o’ her, I truly believe.”

“She has the big love for mankind—the little one.” Père Eugène turned out the lamp, and his voice was husky in the dark. “I must send you home, lad. Lafolo is sick, and I promised to see him again this night.”

Kin went back with a fourfold trouble sitting on his shoulders among the whispering silences of the forest. But Josephine met him in the bright of the lamplight, with laughter on her face, and wicked fingers to tickle the wrinkles from his eye-corners.

“Listen,” she said. “Oh, Kin, what do you think. Tamasese stole a pound tin of beef—I saw him go out of the storeroom window with it—and he’s been trying to open it with every mortal thing his brain can suggest. You can’t imagine the hideous shape of the thing now—”

"Tamasese has played that game before. All the Banks fellows would thieve the eyes out of your head. We'll give him a scare, Josie. Where is he?"

"Down in the tool shed. I saw him through the kitchen window—and Baso too."

Kin came upon the pair suddenly, and their round eyes rolled in their heads with terror.

"Ah, you find that one belong devil," he said. "Him go hide all-e-day. He make you faces, Tamasese?"

Tamasese dropped the tin with a howl.

"He no go devil. He to eat——"

"Pick him up an' try," said Kin. "Pick him up when I tell you. Now, you bring that devil out. Plenty room for him in the forest."

Tamasese went on his knees as Kin produced the can opener. Baso doubled up; shot between Kin's legs, and fled up the path, yelling. And Tamasese's voice came weakly.

"I not know. I put him in the well—dig him hole in ground."

"You'll let him out when I tell you," said Kin sternly. "You hear me?"

Tamasese grovelled, and Josephine pulled at Kin's coat.

"Let him off, Kin——"

"No fear! Up you come now. There you proud chief talk gone? *You* no kill man—take head!"

Tamasese writhed, moaning; and Josephine took the thing from his hands.

"All right, Tamasese. I open him——"

"No!" Tamasese beat his head on the ground. "Him go hurt you. I—I bring him out; you kill him, sir."

"Bring him out, then."

"Kin, you shan't. He'll have a fit—Kin! There, then!"

She cast the tin out into the tangle of arums that shone like pure thoughts in the moonshine, and Tamasese caught her by the skirt.

“That old devil, him go have one pain to-night,” he said. “I give him one good with pitchfork.”

Kin took Josephine in, and held her by the arms.

“How am I goin’ to manage my plantation with you interferin’?” he said. “You lost Tamasese a good moral lesson to-night.”

“I’ll give him another in the morning. I’m going to teach him reading every day when he’s done his kitchen work. And—oh Kin—I wanted to ask you something.”

“Well?”

“Can I go down to the quarters?”

Kin laughed. Then he pushed the hair back from her forehead, and looked down on her.

“My faith, Josie; there isn’t much good sayin’ no to you, I think. You’re one too many for me. Yes; you can go, dear. But if you see things that hurt you, remember that you can’t run niggers on strictly white-man lines.”

It was Diego who knew this most fully, and who gave to Kin the perpetual rowelling that Haddington’s spur decreed. Kin bore this, with the ache in his arm and the unsatisfied heart desires, and said no word. But a bigger thing came one day to send him to the beach with the killing lust in his eyes. A screed in Haddington’s own hand brought news that complaint had been made of the copra deported from his plantation; and Kin, who had overseen the husking and drying of it himself, disbelieved with frank scorn, until a whisper ran up from Ah See’s saloon. Three trading vessels came in with the tide on the following night, and by daybreak Diego was gone to the beach. Kin tabulated knowledge gained by divers ways, and took the track

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that led down the forest paths to the village, up the grassy street where girls smoked and giggled, under the bougainvilleas that shrouded the saloon doors, and into the reeking bar where the smoke rack was blue.

"Is Luis Diego here?" demanded Kin, shouldering through the quick-eyed yellow half-castes, and the lazy Kanakas, and the sprinkling of whites from the plantations.

Someone told that Diego had been in with a trader, and had thereafter gone down to the boat. Kin wheeled and a beachcomber said:

"If you value your life, Severne, you'll be careful what you say on the *Ysabel*."

The man was crumpled and sodden with drink. Kin knew him for one of Père Eugène's crosses.

"Why so, Poddy?"

"I suppose you know what they're after?"

"Yes. I'm goin' to tell 'em so."

"Take a shooter, then," suggested a little rabbit-faced man in white.

Kin grinned.

"Thanks, no. It's only a mornin' call. I'm not goin' to be rude."

He walked down to the splash of little waves against the pier, and his skin tingled with unlawful excitement. But he was angry enough to be wise. The boat next the *Ysabel* was loading, and the queer high-pitched call of the black boys as they slung the crane baskets came with the clank of engines and the croak of sea birds diving for scraps to fill the hot sleepy air. Farther down the strip of white sand a girl played with two children, and for one heart throb Kin thought of Josephine. The gangway of the *Ysabel* was up. Kin jumped as she rolled, slipped on the greasy deck, nodded impudently to the brace of men lying in the bows, and disappeared down the companion.

Diego's voice met him at the bottom, and he followed his quick knock into the saloon.

“An' that's all right,” he said cheerfully. “Just wanted to ask you where you got your inferior copra from, Diego. I can be rammin' it into our lot while you sell Hatch the good. We're shippin' by the *John Duncan* to-morrow, you know.”

Diego sprang up with a curse, but Hatch barred him. “I reckon you're mistaken some,” he said.

Kin looked him between the eyes. The man was pure type of the trader—alert and keen witted, with the roll of the sea in his walk and the Islands' cunning on his tongue.

“I see Diego's drunk again, Captain Hatch,” he said. “Will you tell him—when he can understand—that I've put new locks on the copra sheds to-day, an' that I mean to keep the keys myself. So you'd better rearrange your business while there's time.”

“Don't know what you're talkin' of,” said Hatch. “I'm not carryin' copra this trip.”

“You're not carryin' mine. That's all I care about. An' you'll not carry it next trip either. You an' Grant made a regular game o' this, Diego; but you're not goin' to try it on with me. That's all. Good morning.”

He went, swiftly, as he had come. Hatch looked at Diego.

“Grant'll be on his ear about this,” he said.

But Diego's answer was not shaped for the world to hear.

Diego stayed in the village three days. Then he came back, and whined for forgiveness. Josephine, in her large pity, gave him flannel for a rheumatic knee and soft wadding pads for a cut on his head. Kin, pending remarks from Grant, sat tight and waited. Then followed days of pure peace and sunshine, with Josephine to sing about the once silent house, and

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Josephine to romp with a half-score children in the garden, and Josephine to superintend the making of the pig fence and the fowl-run in a pigeon English that set Kin laughing until the tears ran down. There was Josephine too, soft voiced and tender fingered, in the native quarters, teaching to the women the thousand simple things that a woman only can teach; and Josephine to learn, grave-eyed and eager, many mysteries that Père Eugène had to tell concerning the dressing of sores and the healing of diseases. And in the midst of all Kin went about his work, and loved her more dearly day by day; and sat, oftentimes, with the ink dry on his pen, to listen for her foot behind him.

Came a morning with a touch of cool frost in the air, and a blue, blue sky for the great trees to toss their heads against. Kin sat in the verandah and wrote, with red and purple and white convolvulus making a frame for Baso where he worked in the taro patch. His skin was pure polished bronze, and his scant drawers and shirt were bright pink. He used the shovel with a grand shoulder sweep, and incessantly he whistled a tune that Kin knew of old. It overlay the murmur of life far off in the fields, and irritated Kin because he could not place it.

“It’s not one of their himenes,” he said. “An’ it’s not a beach song——”

And then two hands came over his eyes in swift silence.

He put up his own, and drew the head down against his cheek.

“More interruptions? That’s the sixth in a little half-hour. What is it, Josie?”

Josephine came round to sit on the chair arm.

“You should be more careful, Kin,” she said. “Suppose it had been Vaimuina.”

Vaimuina was six feet about and about, and she had the tread of a marching army. Moreover, she made the best jellies and fruit salads in all the Island. Kin grinned.

“What’s the name of that tune of Baso’s?” he said. “I fancy I’ve heard it before.”

“I fancy you have. You whistle it most days yourself. And nearly as badly as Baso too.”

“I know; I know, It’s ‘Companion of my destiny.’ My Josephine, will that be true—to the end, I wonder?”

“Of course,” she said, wide eyed. “How could it be anything else?”

“Couldn’t, love. No—will you be pleased to let me get on with my work?”

“Directly. I just came to say—I don’t think there was ever anyone quite so happy as I am.”

Kin put an arm around her clumsily.

“So you don’t mind bein’ rooted out of the old life an’ dumped down in a strange land, eh?”

“With you! Besides, the old life was gone. When I first heard about it all,” said Josephine, with her eyes hidden, “I thought happiness was dead for ever and ever. And now I see that I didn’t really know what happiness was. You’ve done a great deal in teaching me that, Kin.”

“You taught me first. And you weren’t pleased because I made use of it.”

“You make use of it now, and I don’t mind. Where’s the end of that thing you were writing? I could only find ten pages this morning.”

“Oh, could you? That’s why I didn’t find any just now, I suppose. No—that’s not it——”

“What—poetry! Kin!”

“I don’t—it isn’t. Give it up.”

She fled round the table, with the gold light on the snushine of her face.

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It was a half-dozen lines scribbled on the back of an envelope—

“Breath of spring on the long grey hills,
Breath of content on the sea;
The breathing of peace where the evening stills
In rose-red ripples on sleepy rills,
And the breath of delight for me—Sweetheart—
Sweetheart with the sunny eyes—
Of Love’s own delight for me.”

“Kin,” said Josephine.

“It’s your fault,” said Kin, chewing his pen handle unabashed.

“I never wrote that kind o’ rot before—an’ I won’t do it again. It’s a bad habit.”

“You—you never say anything,” said Josephine, her lips trembling. “Am I really your ‘Breath of Delight,’ Kin?”

“My darling, you’re that, an’ everything else; but I don’t go ’round trumpetin’ the fact. Now, give me that back and run away.”

Josephine stuffed the paper into the breast of her frock.

“I’m going to keep it for always,” she said. “And then when we get to be snuffy, quarrelling, deaf old fogies, I’ll be able to remember that you used to say nice things once.”

She rumbled up his hair, dodged from his grasping hands, and Kin heard the quick steps of a jig through the house to the gay lilt of “Father O’Flynn.”

He went back to his work with a sigh that strangled the smile on his mouth.

“It’s a five-year bond yet,” he said. “God help us both—an’ God forgive me if I bring her sorrow out of it.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SPUR SMITES AGAIN

"KIN! Kin! Oh, come quickly, Kin!"

The stable door slammed open from Kin's shoulder, and he caught Josephine before she had stumbled three steps beyond the gate.

"What is it? Are you hurt? Josie——"

"A man—they're flogging him—tied up to a post—in the quarters. Kin! Stop them."

Kin's face changed and whitened.

"He deserves it, dear. Never mind. Come back to the house."

"What? Kin—you won't?"

"Yes. Don't be frightened. It won't hurt him."

"Won't hurt him," said Josephine in a strangled tone. "I saw blood on the whip. Won't hurt him. Are you going to stop it?"

"Tomaso will be through by now. It was only twenty-five lashes. Don't mind, dear——"

"Let me go," said Josephine.

"Josie, don't be silly. You have to manage the men that way——"

"Let me go."

Kin put his hands in his pockets, and turned on his heel.

"Very well. You'll remember, I didn't wish you to go to the quarters."

"If you'd told me why I—I wouldn't have," cried Josephine, and fled to the house in a storm of tears.

Kin tramped down the avenue with his mouth set

"She might know it's got to be done." Then again: "Poor little girl. Poor Josie."

A long shrill scream blew on the light wind. Kin flung up his head. The cry caught him again, and it slung him forward on the track as a hound follows up in sight of the kill.

Right and left the plantains dropped behind, and the cocoa palms, and the great bread-fruit that stood at the avenue mouth. Then across the open spaces Kin saw that which he had looked for. There was the reel of heat in the shell-white compound; and there were the sharp black shadows cast by the trees and the squat thatch huts; and there was the tenses quivering black of the few natives who watched, afar off, the crowd that drew round the whipping-post. The line lay clear for the swing of Tomaso's whip, and the curl of it was red in the sun. The scream rang again, and before it had died Kin stood in the passage of the whip lash.

Tomaso lowered it slowly. He was a thick-set Solomon Islander, and, being of the breed that knows no compassion, he regretted that a good stroke should be so spoilt. Diego rolled forward with a swagger.

"The Signor forgets that I manage the field hands," he said. "Taauma was sulky. Ten more for her, Tomaso."

Kin turned to the girl, loosing the straps that bound her. The blood ran from the torn flesh on her shoulders, and the thick hair was matted with it.

"Leave her be, will you?" cried Diego, with an oath.

Kin took no heed.

"Can you stand, Taauma? That's right. Laisola, you go take and wash all-e-same those cuts, an' I give you somethin' nice put on 'em. Go along, Taauma. No find hurt too much, eh?"

Then he swung round on Diego.

"I can attend to you now," he said. "Do you remember what I said I'd do to you next time you flogged one of the women?"

His voice was level, and his body still. But there was a muscle twitching in his throat that made Diego afraid.

"I concern myself with my business, and the Signor concerns himself with his," he suggested, with a shrug.

"Exactly. I am concerned with my business now. Tomaso and Henry, catch this man and tie him up."

"They daren't," screamed Diego.

"Oh, I think they will—when I tell them." He looked round on the men, and they moved forward.

Diego backed, and his face was livid.

"I'll have you cut into ribbons. I'll make a——"

"I'll hear that afterwards. We're goin' to give you a bit o' ribbon work for a pattern, first. Henry——"

"He go give us some jolly bad time 'nother time," remonstrated Henry.

"He will not. I promise you that. Tie him up."

Kin was sick and shaking before all was done, and the stolid Tomaso remarked—

"He no go play round funny one, two, five moons, I don't think it."

Two women on the outskirts giggled. But the more of them were cold with dread. For they feared Diego as they would not have feared the devil.

Kin put up his hand at last.

"That's enough," he said. "Let the brute go."

The straps that held the man's wrists and ankles fell, and Diego fell with them, cursing, as he had cursed these ten past minutes, and writhing in savage pain. Kin's face was grey and hard, and his eyes were not such as Josephine might have seen.

"I'd have given you more if I'd thought you could have carried it. Now, I give you five minutes to clear off this plantation, an' if I see you back again I'll make you sweat for it. D'you hear? Get up."

"I won't. You daren't," snarled Diego from the earth.

"You'll see if I dare. The shadow o' that tree'll be off you in five minutes. If you're not on your feet then I'll tie you up again."

Tomaso was squatted on his haunches, his great chest panting, his round eyes gloating.

"My word; him some big chief down our Island," he said, in a wide respect.

Diego came to his knees, groaning. Then he stood up and reached for his shirt.

"Haddington'll kill you for this. I'll kill you——"

"Time's near up. You needn't bother to put on your shirt if you ain't goin'."

Diego spat one sentence at Tomaso.

"I'll take it out o' your black hide for this," he said, and Tomaso grinned.

"Me no care. Me go home my poor old mother in Busi, all same time."

"The shadow's off," said Kin. "I'd advise you to go home, Diego, an' get your wife to look after you. If you go messin' round the saloons you'll soon turn it up, you know."

Diego caught at the post. It was smeared with the blood of three, and his hand slipped on it.

"You daren't kick me out," he gasped. "There's Haddington——"

"In Sydney. Quite so. And I am here. Are you going?"

He went back to the house with feet that dragged, for body and mind were weak from the tension. He shut himself into the little writing room that looked

down on a nick of the Pacific, and dropped his head on the desk in the litter of papers.

"Haddington must speak now," he said. "An' Grant will be speakin' on his own. Josie, little girl; should I 'a left you to Macintosh, I wonder?"

He sat until the blue glint of sea paled to steel. Then the warmth of Josephine's body was against him, and her hands soft round his head.

"Kin—dearest—it was all my fault. Of course you know best. You—aren't angry with me, Kin?"

For the moment Kin did not remember. Then he turned and caught her in his arms.

"Josie, we must never quarrel. Never, dear; never. Life may be too short for that."

"It would always be too short—even if it were five hundred years long. I have made you a pineapple jelly, Kin—made it all my own self—and dinner is just ready."

Kin laughed.

"The deep cunning of her! Just give me time to wash, then. And Josie, if you want anyone from the quarters, just send for them. I don't want you to go down for a day or two."

Kin saw Taauma that evening, and gave her fresh lotions and a command concerning Josephine which she faithfully obeyed. And after he went into the village, picked up an overseer of sorts from the wash of a half-score islands, and met Père Eugène on the home trail.

"I've kicked Diego out," he said; "an' I don't know how Haddington will take it. Father, you know it all. Did I do right to bring her here? Did I do right?"

Père Eugène's voice came huskily under the broad hat.

"Yes; you did right. Though she suffers she will

have had her joy. And you must not dwell on these things, my son. Take the present, and rejoice in it; for it alone is yours."

Through the untroubled passing of a two full months Kin attempted to believe it. But he took the days by one and one, jealously, and wringing from them all that they could give. He grew through those days, and Père Eugène saw it; noting the patience and reserve born of all the years of loneliness and pain and bitter struggles. Noting, too, the softening of the hard grain in him under Josephine's child-love for her kind, and the wider gentleness that gave new strength to his grip on the men whom he ruled.

His hours of work lengthened and straitened with loss of Diego, and through the nights and the early mornings, with the whole great world to listen, he wrote, breathlessly, unrelentingly, with the dread sitting between his shoulders and chasing his pen-nib.

His stories made Josephine laugh when she read them to Père Eugène. Laugh with a sob in her throat, and Père Eugène coughing behind her; for they shouted of Life as Kin knew it now. Quick, pungent picturesque life, with a lilt to stir the heart as the drum rattle stirs it, and an undertow of meaning that called back much—and, many times, too much—to the one who read.

The second month died in the throes of a wild, black storm-wrack; and next morning all the world was new-made with waterfalls gleaming on the rock faces, and ropes of pearly spider webs across the purple convolvulus on the verandahs, and iridescent bubbles brimming in the lily cups. Josephine came out to the blue of the sea, and the blue of the sky, and all the golden sunlight in the green tops where the birds sang. And she said to Kin, with the glory washing down the sky to her:

"Kin, it hurts one. It is too lovely to last."

"Don't," said Kin sharply; then he pulled her hair and went into breakfast, and talked nonsense until he forgot that there was anything in the world but that glad brown face across the white of the table-cloth. After this he lit a pipe, turned into the plantain avenue, and met Grant.

Grant looked at him and nodded.

"Yes," he said; "I've come from Haddington. We'd best get somewhere where we can talk quietly. I've come to hit hard."

Josephine's quick foot brushed the wet leaves on the track.

"Kin," she cried; "did you forget to order——" She stopped, holding up her head, and the colour flushed into her face.

"I didn't know——" she began; and the back-flung young body and clear eyes beneath the curved brows gave Grant thought of a deer suddenly cornered.

Kin spoke swiftly.

"Send Baso to the village if you want anything. I shall be busy for an hour or so. Come this way, Mr. Grant."

Grant followed silently to the little writing room. There Kin locked the door and said:

"What is it?"

Grant's face was strange, and he sat down heavily.

"Is that your wife? Great Heavens, man; is that your wife? Diego said you'd got one, but of course I thought you'd gone in for the native racket. That little Eng——"

"Will you say what you've come to say, Grant?"

"Yes—I'm glad I saw her. By Jupiter, Severne, I'm going to make you sit up. You wouldn't like to part with her, eh?"

Just now Kin was past personal feeling. It was

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necessary to get the gist of this matter from Grant without delay, and he hammered his question home persistently.

“What does Haddington say?”

“You’ll hear directly. He’s sent your walking ticket. I’ve got it in my pocket. There’s a little matter of my own, first——”

“Give me Haddington’s letter.”

“All serene. Don’t get in a sweat. You don’t mean to play crooked, then?”

“Have I played crooked since I had to do with Haddington?”

“No. I believe he thinks you are an honourable man. I don’t—now.”

He picked up a thimble that lay with some white work on a chair, and Kin’s eyes blazed suddenly.

“Drop that; don’t you touch—anything in this house. Well? What is it?”

“You’re the most unpliant man I ever met,” said Grant reflectively. “And very nearly the biggest fool. If you’d worked things here as Diego and I wanted you to, I’d have kept Haddington quiet. He was quite content to think of you slaving for him for seven years without any wage, for he knew Diego wouldn’t give you a bed of roses to lie on. But you’ve done for yourself by that game with Diego. I think the brute’s a relation—son, perhaps—and you’ve done for yourself again by that copra racket. And so——”

Kin stood by the window. His face was unmoving, and his teeth had met in the edge of his lip. He tasted the blood as he spoke.

“Where does Haddington want me to go?”

Grant peered under his heavy lids.

“Sort of cleft stick, isn’t it? Been pinching, eh? Yes; you look it. And your wife——”

"Keep her name out of your mouth. Will you tell me before I make you?"

"Your stories are much prettier than your conversation. Yes, I'll tell you with pleasure. Haddington wants to start a plantation in Lifu—quite a philanthropic affair—and he deposes you as agent."

"Lifu? Have I heard of it? Lifu?"

Grant lay back in his chair.

"Yes," he said, with a slight laugh; "I think you have heard of it."

"Lifu. Lifu. Not—oh, great——, not that! Not

"The leper island? Exactly."

Kin put out his hand, and grasped blindly at the curtain. Then he swung round, looking out of the window, and Grant saw that the grip on the muslin was very steady.

Callous indifference was on his own face still. The islands had taught him that of all the world's goods there was but one worth the holding or having. Forasmuch as Kin had blocked this, he must go. There was no court of appeal from that. And, with Haddington, Grant had supplied the manner.

"Pretty view out there, Severne?"

Kin turned round. Except that he walked as a man may who has received a heavy blow on the head, Grant saw no change in him.

"Give me Haddington's letter," he said.

He read it, once, twice; then folded and put it in his breast pocket.

"Well; you've told me," he said. "Now, go."

"Don't be in such a blazing hurry," said Grant. "I want to know what you mean to do about it."

"That's not your business. I account to Haddington."

"By Jingo, but I think it is my business. If you

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burk this I'm going to make some feathers fly on my own. You've interfered with me once too often, Severne."

Kin opened the door, and stood.

"I will see you on the beach in the morning," he said quietly. "Will you go now?"

He watched Grant down the avenue, and walked back to the house. It was a blind deafness that was creeping over him, but there was one thing to do first.

"Josie," he called through the door, "if you see that fellow Grant anywhere, don't speak to him. He's not a nice chap for you to know."

"Oh, that's why you didn't introduce him—all right, dear. Kin, have you got neuralgia? Your voice sounds tired."

"No. Fit as a fiddle. Don't come in for a little, Josie. Grant brought me some extra work to fix up." Then he shut the door.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THEN FARE YE WEEL, MY BONNIE, BONNIE LASS" (*Braes o' Yarrow*)

PÈRE EUGÈNE finished his supper of boiled rice and cocoa-nut milk, carried the plate within, and came out again to look upon his world from the hill-top. Down the slope the crisp bright twilight had washed itself through scarlet waves into black with a few great eyes set in it that were the lights of the village. There was noise in the village, and laughter, and the beating of drums; and, skirling far above all, the quick step of the bagpipes in the grip of a master.

Père Eugène smiled, and the eyes goggled back at him merrily.

"Stuart will ask heavy toll of Taimusu for that," he said. "Ay, but the lad is flinging money with a free hand to-day. Well, well; a pretty pair they made. And it seems but yesterday that I received little Mota into the Church, and Taimusu the day before." He smiled again as a swirl of torches showed waving arms under the flame. "And my marriage fees a full sucking pig and as many taros as I can wish. Truly Taimusu is a great man. And if that is a stray cur in my larder——"

He hastened back to the little tin bulge at the room end, secured the perforated zinc window, and sought in the dark for his lamp, turning the bagpipe tune into words on his lips.

"Till all the streams run dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt with the sun;
And I will love you still, my dear—
My dear—where is that——"

A man's heavy tread came over the threshold, and a voice that Père Eugène did not know.

"Father—that you? By yourself?"

"Assuredly, my friend. But I fear—Kin! My dear lad! What——"

"Where are you? No; don't make a light."

And then Père Eugène's middle was caught about with a steel grip that hurt, and Kin cried:

"Father, if there is any comfort in Heaven or earth, give it to me. For God's sake give it to me."

Père Eugène's hand came on the hot forehead, and the strength of his priesthood spoke in him.

"There is comfort for all things. Tell me, my son."

"I must leave her. Leave her. Leave her. Do you understand? Never to see her or touch her again——"

He was heavy weight against the priest's knees, and the grasp of his arms tightened. But Père Eugène said, unmoving:

"That is not so. Beyond this day is the everlasting year. Tell me, Kin."

"Tell it! Yes. Words are easy to say—till you put the meaning into them. Oh, Great God in Heaven——"

The lump was in Père Eugène's throat, but he took the prayer and carried it on in strong words, deep and few, such as men need. Then came silence, and the far, far drone of the pipes with the music left out. Kin stood up.

"He told me this morning," he said. "Grant; Haddington sent him. He told me—where are you? My head is stupid, I think."

"The bed is here. That is better. Yes, dear lad. It is still the old contract?"

"And I can't go back from it. I can't go back on my word. What is it in me that won't let me go back on my word? I must hold it though everything breaks to it—even Josie."

“He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not,” quoted the priest.

“His own hurt! Ah, don’t you think that’s what cuts! Don’t you think it is her hurt that I have made her love me and find her happiness here—and I must send her away—I, who have brought this on her because——”

“Because you have endeavoured to walk uprightly, Kin. The new locks on the copra sheds, and the beating of a man who beat a woman. There is no sin in such things as these.”

“I don’t know,” said Kin dully. “If I had given in——”

“You could not have given in.”

“No—there are five years yet to run. I am to spend them in Lifu, teach——”

“Lifu?”

Kin laughed unsteadily.

“Don’t take your hands off mine. They are clean still. In five years, perhaps——”

“Kin——” Père Eugène tried thrice and choked on the words. Then he said, with the ring of his hot youth back in his words:

“No man has the right to force such an impious command. Defy it. I’d see—I’d see him eternally damned first.”

“It’s just this”—Kin spoke slowly, as though he were trying to think—“in what way do you define honour? And what is a man’s life like to be worth to himself or anyone else if he once feels that he has lost his honour?”

“It would be imbecility for you to feel anything of the sort in such circumstances.”

“It would not; and you know it. I took, promising payment. And if it meant her death and mine I would give the payment. You told me I made her responsible before. Do you think I would make her responsible

now—for what I consider the greatest thing a man has?”

“There are circumstances——”

“They don’t count. I made them—afterwards.”

Kin rose wearily. “If that’s all you’ve got to say I’m goin’. I can’t——”

There was a rustle as the priest stood up.

“Well might you say, ‘Get thee behind me.’ But oh, my son, my son, you do not know——”

“I think I do. The air will be putrid with the thing, of course. But whites don’t live there long, as a rule. Never mind that. It’s my business, when I come to it. I’m thinkin’ of Josie now.”

“You cannot tell her—this.”

“No; I’ll tell her as little as I can. An’ then I must send her back—I have scraped some cash together, y’know. Story-writin’ has paid of late. I owe you thanks for that. An’ I’ll send a screed to old Dick. If he’s got sense in him to read it he’ll help her for my sake. If not, there is Doody. But I don’t like her goin’ alone——”

“I will take her.”

“You?”

“Is there anything that I would not do for you and for her, my own dear lad?”

“Thanks,” said Kin huskily. “That helps more than I can tell you.”

A wind swept down the hill, bending the tall tops with the sound of a hand sweeping over harp strings. It passed to the wide sea, and the world was empty, saving for the clumsy flutter of a night bird across the doorway, and the breathing of the two men in the dark.

“When is it to be, Kin?”

“I don’t know. I must see Grant in the morning, and—and fix things up. She must go first—this week, perhaps.”

He moved, feeling for Père Eugène's shoulder.

“Good-night, old chap. I must go back. I won't tell her till I have seen Grant again. And then—the sooner she goes the better.”

“You are—you are quite determined, Kin?”

“Yes.”

On all that face or movement might have shown the dark was shut down, leaving only the strained voices in the night.

“Call on me for all that you want. And know that she—dear to me for her own sake—is thrice dear for yours. I will see to the little one, Kin.”

“Thanks. Good-night.”

In the dark their hands met, and Kin went out. The priest groped through the room to the crucifix hung on the wall, and lit the small taper before it. The light leapt to the stretched hands and the drooping head, and Père Eugène fell on his knees.

“The sins of the father,” he said. “Upon the children. Upon the children. And yet does the curse remain with me. I dare not tell him, and I dare not tell her—my little daughter—my little Josephine. God be merciful unto me, a sinner.”

Lights went out in the village, and the stars were serene over sea and earth. In the candle flicker Père Eugène's face was old and drawn with anguish. He bent his forehead to the cross.

“Lord—I that have blood upon my hands—I that sinned to save her from a life of sin—may I be permitted to render comfort to the child of my flesh—to Annie's child. May I be permitted to strengthen the dear lad——” His voice stilled to murmurs. But the long night and the dawn break found him praying still.

There was a clipped hour's talk with Grant in the morning, and then Kin sought for Josephine.

She was dusting the little bedroom that peered on a

corner of the great forest, and she turned on him with vague fear in her eyes.

"What is it, Kin?" she said. "You said it was neuralgia—but do you think I don't know that it is more than neuralgia?"

"Clever little woman! Well, it is a bit more, dear. I told you long ago, Josie, that trouble might come to you and me. I have told you so since."

She caught the lapels of his coat, dropping her duster.

"Kin—what is it?"

Kin put his hand over hers, drawing them together in a grip that hurt. And in mercy he spoke straightly.

"It has come, dear. I must go away from you—for a time. I have—work to do for Haddington in an island where I couldn't take you. I will be away some years, Josie."

"Will you say that again," she said slowly.

He upturned her face, smiling with stiff lips.

"Did I plump it on you too suddenly? Clumsy brute I always am! Poor little girl. But—supposing I were a soldier, an' a war broke out. You'd have to let me go then, Josie."

"Go? Go away from me? Is that what you mean? Kin, Kin; you can't. Oh, you can't. I haven't anybody but you—Kin. Take me—take me too."

"Steady, Josie. Steady, dearie. It's—it's not so bad, you know. You'll just go back to the old home—Dick'll let you live there when I ask him—an' in a year or two, when I come back—"

Already he had ventured all that he dared. He stopped, looking over her bright head, and out through the sunlit window to the blue beyond.

"I won't go back. I will not. Why shouldn't I go with you? A wife can go anywhere with her husband. Dress me up as a man, then, if it's not a fit place for a

woman. I don't care. You can say what you like, Kin, I will go.”

“A wife should give obedience to her husband, shouldn't she? That's the first act. My faith, Josie, you want Père Eugène at you.”

“You don't care! You can laugh about it. You're going away to see new things, and leaving me——”

“Josie.”

“Oh Kin—oh Kin—I don't know. Just hold me—Kin——”

Kin spoke rather bitterly.

“Where's your old cry about 'All's right with the world,' Josie?”

She clung to him in a long silence. Then she put back her head.

“I—I will try to say it, Kin. But—I can't quite understand yet.”

“My poor little girl; I'm handlin' you roughly again. It knocked me over a bit at first too. But we must make the best of it, Josie. We've had six months——”

“Oh yes; and think of all the years we'll have when you come back. They'll make up, won't they? You said you'd only be a year or two, Kin?”

“I—I——”

“Kin, you don't think you'll be there longer?”

“No, Josie. God help me; I don't think I'll be there any longer.”

She forced a smile that hurt Kin more than her tears.

“Then, of course, we must make the best of it. You mustn't be the only brave one. And—and is it very dangerous, Kin? Is that why you won't take me?”

“Dangerous for a woman, dear. I'll be knockin' about wi' all kinds of chaps, you see. An' there mightn't be much accommodation——”

“Oh, but you must have your meals regularly. You

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know you always get neuralgia when—oh Kin, must you go?”

“I must. There’s no good goin’ over that, dear. I thought it out before I ever saw you. I—what is it, dear?”

“Let me stay here with Père Eugène. I can be working and helping? And I—I’ll be nearer you.”

“Here! With Grant about—an’ Diego. My little girl, you don’t know. No, Josie, you must go back to Katty and Doody and old Dick, and Père Eugène’s goin’ to take you. An’ now, we must talk business, little girl; for there’s lashin’s an lavin’s of work to be done.”

It was at the week end, with his boat leaving at day-break, that Père Eugène spoke again with Kin. Kin had his pipe in his mouth, because Josephine had put it there; but the scent of tobacco was long since dead on the evening air.

“Kin,” said Père Eugène to the man who walked beside him, up and down the grassy ways, and up and down—“Kin, have you thought what you will do with your life out there?”

Kin laughed without mirth.

“Haddington says I’ll ‘teach the unfortunate creatures self-help, a virtue which the French Government doesn’t inculcate with any certainty.’ An’ Josie says, ‘Wat lots o’ new things you’ll find to write about.’ An’ you say?”

“My son, there is your Garden of Gethsemane—and there is your Valley of the Shadow; and if they wait for you there, Kin, remember that there are two ways of passing through them.”

“I know. Don’t worry about that, father. I’ve got to meet her again—and you.”

Then the priest’s hand slid into Kin’s arm, and they turned back to the house together.

Three vessels were loading at the morning's dawn, and the beach was gay as the soft mist rolled back up the hills, to catch in torn ribbons among the great tree tops. Père Eugène talked with a brown-faced knot that were native teachers and boys of his Sunday school class. But presently he broke from them, and came up the narrow wharf to the gangway that creaked and swung.

The smell of the salt sea, and of new-caulked boards, and of roasted bread fruit blew along the beach, and Grant strolled up the companion, nodding to the priest.

“Took the precaution of comin’ aboard in case he gives us the slip,” he explained. “I’m going to round him in on another tack, then. But what’s making him do it? I’d have bet Haddington any money that he would have bunked. What’s making him crucify himself? For it is a crucifixion: you can see it in his face. Why in the name of Fortune doesn’t he run?”

“He that saveth his life shall lose it,” said the priest, drawing his cassock closer, for the morning air was chill.

“Oh, that old cant’s worn out,” said Grant indifferently.

“Is it? When a man will do what he is doing, because he deems it right, I think he does but prove the eternal truth of that which you call cant.”

Grant laughed, shrugging his shoulders.

“Well; he’s getting his chance to prove it all right. Hatch is taking him down in the *Ysabel*, an’ he won’t get shut of her till he’s landed. I arranged that. And what have you got to say about it, father?”

“Nothing—to you,” said Père Eugène, and turned his back.

Down in the little cabin Josephine was whispering to Kin.

“Never say that. Never; never say I’d have been

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happier if I hadn't known. You have given me more than I can forget in all the years that may come."

Kin was looking at her strangely.

"And you have given me immortality," he said; "you and Père Eugène."

The warning howled twice from the blackened funnel, and the sailors were barefoot and swift along the deck when Kin came up. Grant stood aside to hear his words to the priest. But they were none, save "Good-bye," and again, "Good-bye."

Then Kin went down the gangway, and down the wharf, amid the fluttering, giggling girls. And he did not look back to see that Grant followed after.

CHAPTER XXV

LIGHTS OUT

THE Deadman's Hut was bleak in the winter afternoon, and a single trail lay over the snow without to the door. Macintosh saw it, and saw the flutter of black past the lintel. He had been out since dawn after sheep; and his temper was on edge. He ploughed through the drift and flung open the heeled-over door.

"Wha the de'il—eh, ha' maircy! It's the black priest!"

Père Eugène turned at the word.

"Macintosh," he said. "Do you know me, Macintosh?"

"The—the black priest," stuttered Macintosh. "But—yer butes wur on the snaw. Then—eh! Man abune a'! It's Maister Philip."

"Katty is the only other who knew me—or who will know me. I——"

"'Tis ye hae brocht her back, then—yer daughter. An' what hae ye dune wi' her lad? Hae ye fund wrang on on him wi' her? Whaur is he? Or hae ye kilt him like the ither?"

"That is past," said Père Eugène quietly. "I would have given my old life for his—an' I could."

"Is he no comin' back fur her, then?"

Père Eugène was tracing a flaw on the window glass with an absent finger.

"He is not coming back," he said.

Macintosh stared agape.

"Ye're the fair pickle o' the ghaist that hes haunted the Hut this twal' or fifteen year," he cried.

"And have I not haunted it," cried Père Eugène—"in dreams. Is there a night that I am not here—in dreams."

"Ma certie! Ye hae a richt tae! Whaur is her lad?"

"He has gone to his death, I think. But she does not know. I will know—I hear all things along the beach—and then—it will be time enough to tell her."

"It's the auld life fur her again, then?"

"No," said Père Eugène; "it is the new life. To work and to wait, and to hope—as one who knoweth."

He paused on the broken threshold, and held out his hand.

"I go to-morrow," he said. "She will be well cared for, and I go to my work, and to news of him. Will you take my hand, Macintosh? For, of we three men who have striven in this hut, I think that you only will cross its door sill again."

The light blinked and shivered over the cross that was red in the window, and a puff of wind shook the door latching.

But the little squat hut stood four square to the wind, and flung the echo back with a chuckle. For well it knew that Père Eugène spoke truth.



